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BRUCE LECTURES

THE PURPOSE OF JESUS IN
THE FIRST THREE GOSPELS

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

THE HEATHEN HEART

THE MIND OF THE EARLY
CONVERTS, ETC.

THE PURPOSE OF JESUS
in the
FIRST THREE GOSPELS

by
Campbell N. Moody
M.A., D.D.

The Bruce Lectures delivered in the United Free
Church College, Glasgow, in 1929

THE PURPOSE OF JESUS
IN THE
FIRST THREE GOSPELS
BY
CAMPBELL N. MOODY
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LONDON
George Allen & Unwin Ltd
MUSEUM STREET

FIRST PUBLISHED IN 1929

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NOTE

I AM indebted to the Editor of the *Expository Times* for kind permission to make some use in my second chapter of an article on "Spiritual Power in Pagan Religions and in the Old Testament", and of a second on "Spiritual Power in Later Judaism and in the New Testament", contributed by me in the year 1927.

CAMPBELL N. MOODY

BOTHWELL

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INTRODUCTION

ALL Christians are agreed that during the present century the people have become more and more estranged from Christianity. The reasons for this are many, and the deepest are perhaps beyond our ken. Among secondary causes one is that the followers of Christ of every school are less attached to Him than they once were, and that in our pulpits the preaching of Christ is not as it used to be: in some of the ablest sermons of the present day there is small mention of the name of Jesus. This may appear a strange issue for a movement which has produced a multitude of "lives" of Jesus, and books about Him in endless variety, to say nothing of the motto, "Back to Christ". But those who are familiar with the theological literature of our generation must be aware that for preachers immersed in the study of it a lively faith in the Lord Jesus is difficult, not to be retained without battle and earnest prayer.

Of the more recent books upon the New Testament those that repay perusal are, with few exceptions, negative in tendency. When the writer made this remark to a very eminent leader of the Student Christian Movement, he received the reply that an Indian Student who read some volumes recommended to him turned from the subject with the conclusion that a religion about which there was so much uncertainty claimed no further attention. Many of the scholars of our time have exercised

their skill in throwing doubt upon the records of Christ's deeds and words. This they have done in an astonishing variety of ways. We are not speaking of a mere comparison of the Gospels, where a critic must endeavour to choose between divergent accounts. All that Christians have hitherto valued has been questioned and denied.

The assertions and constructions of critical writers have often proved quite as hurtful as their doubts and denials. Christ and His Apostles, who once seemed near to us, have become remote and strange: they who once were great, have been made to appear little. Paul becomes a Jewish rabbi, so alien in his thoughts that we begin to wonder whether he can have any message for our time. He is accused of corrupting with theological subtlety the simple Gospel of Jesus, and of blending with this Gospel a set of pagan notions which, in spite of himself, the Hebrew of Hebrews imbibed in the city of Tarsus. How small the Apostle looks! His thoughts are full of inconsistency and self-contradiction. His character is not above reproach. He is charged with impatience, irritability, and unfairness to opponents, with a fondness for self-laudation, and with far-seeing craft that makes use of flattery. Yet, we are assured, with his many faults, he must be reckoned a great man still!

Paul is severely contrasted with his Lord. His theology is found to be artificial and tortuous when placed beside the plain moral precepts of Jesus.

Does the disparagement of the follower imply exaltation of the Founder of Christianity? Far from it. It is usually the case that when contrasts of this sort are drawn, and even when, in a more kindly spirit, resemblances are pointed out, the Jesus who is imagined is not the Jesus of the Gospels, but a lesser person, a person who made few claims for Himself, and merely taught about God and the right attitude to Him.

Apart from such comparisons, it must be observed that the general tendency of recent literature is to make Jesus seem smaller and less interesting than Christians had believed Him to be. The study of later Judaism has indeed shed much light upon the Gospels; but knowledge, like wealth, is a dangerous possession, and the knowledge of Judaism has not always been put to a proper use. From a number of His sayings it has been inferred that Jesus shared the narrower aims and more fanatical expectations of some of His fellow countrymen regarding God's Kingdom and His Anointed, while sayings that conflict with such inference have been slighted, or treated as interpolations due to the Church of a later time. Christian writers have not scrupled to picture Jesus as an enthusiast who cherished vain dreams, and shifted from one plan to another as each in turn failed. They see Him baffled in Galilee, and then turning with fresh expectation to Jerusalem, where perhaps He might have gained the multitude, but for the treachery of Judas, which ruined all, till

there was nothing left for the Leader of the little band but to clutch at the desperate hope that through death, somehow or other, His cause would be advanced. This is the Saviour of the world!

There are many ways of dimming the glory of Jesus. Some of His professed followers have hinted that He was not quite just to the Pharisees. Not long ago one who is eminent in the Church observed that he himself did not acknowledge flaws in the character of Jesus, but he added that, if there were any, they were mere spots in the sun.

The commonest and most insidious mode of belittling Jesus is the misrepresentation of His teaching. This misrepresentation is of two kinds. Many authors adopt the plan of suspecting, eliminating, or transforming, any utterance that incommodes their theory. Here we may cite the witness of Wrede, whose own scepticism carries him far. His remark is made with regard to Christ's announcements regarding His sufferings, but it is equally applicable to other sayings. Wrede observes that each modern investigator selects from these announcements whatsoever words fit his own construction of the facts, and his own conception of what is historically possible, while he rejects the remainder.¹ At the present day, except in the comparison of the Gospel records with one another, scientific criticism has almost ceased to exist. Hence, in many works upon Christ and His teaching, the

¹ Wrede: *Das Messiasgeheimnis in den Evangelien*, 86-87.

person of Christ is much in the background. It is very prominent in the Gospels; but in the modern writer's mind it is not so, and this, of course, settles the matter.

The other mode of misrepresenting the teaching of Jesus is a less honourable one; yet it is frequently employed. It is the mode of emphasizing part of an utterance and disregarding the rest, as when, for example, our Lord's counsel to the rich young man is cited as proof that He required nothing more than the keeping of the great moral commandments already taught in the Old Testament. Probably those who employ such a mode of interpretation are not altogether conscious of its unfairness; but quite a number of passages are dealt with in this fashion, with the result that Jesus seems to regard attachment to Himself as of no great account.

The misrepresentation of the words of Jesus assumes a variety of forms; but, with a strange and dire accord, it almost always tends to abridge in some degree His majesty and beauty. It is right, no doubt, that the commentator should note rabbinic parallels to many a Gospel saying; but why should he pass in cold silence those great and wonderful utterances which are unique, or why should he labour to draw from them some commonplace meaning? Thus our Lord's utterance regarding the children of the bride-chamber, His announcement to the paralytic, His words about the ransom, and other declarations, are robbed of all special signifi-

cance. Most dreadful is the manner in which Christian writers have desecrated the table of the Lord with trivial interpretations of His last commands.

The more extreme and fantastic theories have had no very wide influence. Yet it is difficult to read much of this literature without being affected by it, or to be constantly confronted with inaccurate pictures of Jesus without taking erroneous impressions. Those who become accustomed to false and one-sided presentations are apt to lose the power of reading the Gospels aright, and quite to misconceive the purpose of Jesus. Many a one, if asked to explain that purpose, would probably answer, He came to reveal the Father. Yet such an answer is certainly not derived from a reading of the first three Gospels, where Jesus, for the most part, speaks of the Father in a somewhat incidental fashion, while of Himself He says far more, and with far more directness and urgency. Of faith in God and submission to His will He says a little, but only a little; of attachment to Himself He speaks again and again, with appalling solemnity, as the one thing needful for time and eternity.

For time and eternity! The modern author and the modern preacher seem to be ashamed of Christ and His words in regard to this tremendous theme. Sometimes these words are apologized for, or explained away; oftener they are contradicted or ignored. Is there anything in our common Christian

instruction that bodes so ill as the persistent contempt for the most urgent words ever spoken by the Son of Man?

Since Jesus is so lightly esteemed by many of the Christian authors of our day, it is no great wonder that preachers pass Him by, and are content to declare the love of the Father and the duty of man, until the Gospel becomes little more than reformed Judaism.

We are all prone to think as we are schooled, and probably most men are little aware that current belief is far removed from the mind of Christ. But is it not amazing that the Church of God is so tolerant of the contradiction of all that a little while ago she held most dear? Truth for which our fathers would have died has been yielded almost without a blow. Treatises and commentaries that tend more to destruction than edification are praised on all hands. And how very few are the well-informed writers who speak warmly for Christ and His words! It is time to speak. It is high time that we came back to the Lord Jesus.

This little book is not, in the main, a defence of long-cherished beliefs. Notwithstanding all that has been written upon the Gospels, many subjects require to be discussed afresh. The occasional reiteration of what is familiar cannot be avoided; but perhaps it may be found that some matters of great significance are now brought before the reader's attention for the first time.



THE PURPOSE OF JESUS IN THE FIRST THREE GOSPELS

CHAPTER I

THE PUBLIC PREACHING

THE Purpose of Jesus has been construed in a great variety of ways. It could hardly be otherwise, since the Gospels make little effort to indicate a purpose; they rather leave us to draw our own inference from their graphic pictures and their jottings of a few extraordinary sayings. Moreover, the interpreters of Jesus have frequently assumed that some truth which appealed to themselves was what He designed to teach. Thus the Early Gentile Christians were convinced that Jesus delivered men from idols, and made known the true Father, or that He destroyed the power of magic, removed darkness, gave knowledge and immortality, or, again, that He proclaimed a new law (Raw Chinese Christians, when they express their own mind, not what they have been taught, give similar answers). The notions of the second century would not have satisfied mediæval saints; and we, of course, have our own ways of looking at the Gospel records.

To tell the truth, there is room for difference of opinion, and I should imagine that most of those who attempt to scan the sacred page with an open

eye must discover that cherished views must be modified, and sometimes quite abandoned, and that even those theories which appear most extreme and unwelcome have much to say for themselves. One of the more revolutionary among modern views is that Jesus hoped at first to establish the Kingdom of God, or to prepare for its supernatural and sudden appearing; and that, when His plans were upset by such events as the threat of Herod, and the betrayal of His secret by Judas, He was driven to the conviction that somehow by His death the result would be achieved. As this theory, which takes many forms, has been sufficiently discussed and criticized, I shall not speak of it except incidentally. It is not incompatible with the much more prevalent doctrine that Christ came to reveal the Father. Thus Professor Ernest F. Scott, who tends to regard Jesus as a Visionary, says, "He revealed God as the Father and taught that the right attitude to him is one of trust and love. He set forth in words, and exemplified in his life, the true righteousness which consists in inward obedience to the will of God. These were the vital elements in his message, and all the rest was framework."¹

That Jesus has revealed the Father is quite beyond dispute. He did not reveal the fact that God is Father. This fact was already known. The belief that the Deity is a father is very widespread, and it is often found among the most primitive peoples.

¹ E. F. Scott: *The Beginnings of the Church*, p. 256.

And the word is not always employed in a cold, bare sense to denote the mere origin of the world and of living creatures; rather, in many cases, it is a term of respect, and expresses kinship, or even some degree of kindly feeling. A warm recognition of God's fatherly love is by no means absent from the Old Testament and the Jewish Apocrypha. Thus modern Jews of enlightenment take offence at Christians, and justly so, when they talk of the Fatherhood of God as if it were a monopoly of the Gospel. And yet it is impossible to deny that the revelation in Jesus is something new.

Every one feels, without perhaps being able to explain it, that in a very few sentences Jesus conveyed a most lively impression of God's interest in His children, and in His lowlier creatures, such as flowers and birds. The singers of Israel did this in an exquisite fashion, as we recognize in reading such psalms as the 104th, the 107th, and the 139th. But there is something that excels, something that goes straight to the heart, in our Lord's plea that if God so cares for the birds and for flowers that will be in the fire to-morrow, He must care far more for His children. And there follows such an appeal as was never made before: Care not for food and clothing; your Heavenly Father cares, for He knows your need: but let your care be for God's Kingdom and His Righteousness.

Jesus conveyed another and a deeper lesson. He proclaimed that God's eye was on the cheap sparrow,

and that His hand was still on the poor bird when it fell dead (or was snared?). So God was guarding the disciples even when they were brought to danger and death. They must not shrink from suffering, since this was in harmony with God's mind. They must not shrink from death; men could kill the body; they need not fear men. It is God who ought to be feared. Yet disciples have nothing to be afraid of; it is their Father's good pleasure to give them the Kingdom. And, to sum up (although it was said in a different connexion), God can never lose interest in any one who, like Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, has once belonged to Him: once a friend, always a friend, yesterday, to-day, for ever: the friends of God cannot die.¹

God's love is not limited to friends. Heaven is merry when one sinner repents. If any sinner turns, he receives from God such a welcome as a wayward son does when he comes home.

Something far more wonderful is still to be mentioned: God loves His enemies. It does not seem very strange that either God or man should forgive the very worst of wrong-doers, if with all his heart he repents. Would it not rather be remarkable if even a Pagan were to repulse such a one? But Jesus expressly enjoined His followers to resemble their Father in an aggressive love for their foes, as they repaid curses with blessings, and prayed for those

¹ Matt. x. 28-31 and Luke xii. 4-7; Mark viii. 32-34; Luke xii. 32; Mark xii. 26-27.

who hunted them down. He could not mean that they were to be more loving than God. It is true that He did not expressly speak of God's own love for His foes, but only of His sun and rain for good and bad alike, or, in Luke's phrase, His kindness to the unthankful. Was this not because, while Jesus lived among men, the best illustration of God's love for His enemies could not be put into words? Here is the love that surpasses nature and reason; it is something not taught in the Old Testament, or anywhere else, so far as I am aware. The Old Testament prophets, almost with one voice, proclaim that God hates His foes. If this were true, there would be no hope for mankind. And, we may add, it is just because Paul recognizes men's hostility to God that his affirmations of God's love are like the grandest music.

Jesus told much about God when He called Him, "My Father". Even when the words were first pronounced, the disciples must have felt that in them they received a new idea. Here in their midst was a human being who loved and trusted God as no one before had ever loved and trusted. They got a new conception of the lovableness and trustworthiness of God. And as Jesus so felt His nearness, they must have become aware that the Living God was near. Yet more, it became their habit to think of God as they looked upon Jesus, until they almost felt as if a new God were becoming revealed to them; this God was the Father of Jesus, known in

coming years to Peter and to Paul as "the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ".

In the presence of such a God the disciples must live. Their deeds of kindness and their fasting were for His eye alone. Their prayers were for His ear. He already knew all, and was as ready as any father to grant good things for the asking. Yet, strange to say, their entreaties were to be shamelessly persistent, as if they took Him for an unsociable neighbour, or an unscrupulous judge. Odd collocation, father, disobliging neighbour, godless judge! Did our Lord wish to hint that to press the metaphor of "Father" in a one-sided fashion would lead to failure in prayer?

God is Father and Judge. We recall such sayings as, "Judge not that you be not judged"; "Except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish"; and the terrible words spoken in connexion with the parable of the Unmerciful Creditor, "So also shall my heavenly Father do unto you." In several other passages God's final judgment is predicted. Jesus has revealed to men, as never before, the love of the Father: He has revealed, as never before, the awfulness of the Judge.

Through His words, and through His life and death, we have received a revelation of God as Father; but was it the chief aim of Jesus to give us this? We may ask a yet bolder question: Apart from the intimations of the Fourth Gospel, would it readily occur to us that this aim was much before

His mind at all? In a well-known passage (Matt. xi. 27) He speaks of a disclosure made by the Son to persons of His choice: this, however, is not a general revelation made through His life and teaching. When, in two cases, He pronounced the forgiveness of sins, He was conscious, of course, of doing what was possible for God alone. But even then He was not disclosing the fact that God was willing to forgive sins, since this fact was abundantly made known in the Old Testament. Rather, His forgiving sins in those special instances made it evident that He regarded Himself as possessing the authority of God.¹

Much of our Lord's teaching in regard to the Father was of an incidental character. This leads to the remark that the doing of God's will is not at all so prominent a theme in the first three Gospels as many writers lead us to suppose, when, for example, they assert that Jesus never asked men to believe in Himself, but only to obey the Father's will. We learn, indeed, from the story of the Temptation,

¹ With reference to the Old Testament doctrine of forgiveness through atoning sacrifice, it must be remembered that the Law of God was also the law of the civil magistrate. Obviously a sin or crime deserving death could not be pardoned: Divine pardon would have had no meaning in an age when it was held that at death both righteous and wicked were banished from God to the dark world beneath. But other sins, such as sins of ignorance, and crimes of robbery, fraud, oppression, and, in some cases, of fornication, could be atoned for by sacrifice. Besides all this, the Day of Atonement cleansed the community from every transgression.

and from the stern rebuke addressed to Peter, that for our Lord obedience to the Father's will was supremely important and supremely difficult; from a petition in the Lord's Prayer (in Matthew's version), and yet more from the prayer in Gethsemane, we see how, at whatever cost, He was resolved to fulfil it. In His teaching He bade men choose between God and Mammon; and in His parable of the Two Sons He implied that the rulers of Jerusalem, notwithstanding their professions, had failed to do God's will. Yet He had no thought that those whom He addressed could be obedient to God while remaining aloof from Himself. At the close of the Sermon on the Mount, in Matthew's version, He intimates that a mere lip-service of Himself is not enough to secure admission to God's Kingdom. Only those disciples who do His Father's will shall be permitted to enter. Most critics, however, prefer Luke's version of this saying (xiii. 25-27), and Luke omits all reference to God's will. The other occasion upon which Jesus mentions the doing of God's will is presented in a graphic fashion by Mark. He is seated indoors surrounded by a crowd of listeners, who give Him no time to eat, when a message arrives that His mother and brothers wish to have a word with Him. He understands what this means, for He answers in effect, My mother and brothers are not those who wish to silence Me, but these men and women around Me, who obey God's will by listening. For anyone who will do God's will

is brother, sister, and mother to Me (Mark iii. 31-35).

It is plain that there was no need to lay stress upon inward loyalty to God as something novel. This was understood by the Old Testament saints, such as Jeremiah and the Psalmist who exclaimed, "I delight to do thy will, O my God; yea, thy law is within my heart" (Ps. xl. 8). The attitude to God was not in dispute. What was in dispute was the attitude to Jesus and His words. It might, of course, be asserted, quite truly, that the supreme end of Jesus was to obey the Father's will, and to bring men to a like obedience. But such a statement is too general to help us much.

Occasional utterances by our Lord Himself express some design, as when He says that He came not to call the righteous but sinners; that He came to seek and to save the lost; that He came not to destroy the Law and the Prophets, but to fulfil them; that He came not to cast peace upon earth, but a sword, and to create fierce division in families; that He came to cast fire upon the earth, and longed for its kindling; and that He came not to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.¹ These are astounding declarations; some of them remind us of exploding bombs. Obviously they are difficult to combine, and incomplete. Yet it is interesting to observe that most of them correct some misappre-

¹ Mark ii. 17; Luke xix. 10; Matt. v. 17; Matt. x. 34-35 and Luke xii. 51-53; Luke xii. 49; Mark x. 45.

hension; the purpose of Jesus was exactly the opposite of what His hearers supposed, or inferred from His speech and behaviour. So then He was misread, even by those who had watched Him for a long time. We are put on our guard, but how can we be sure that we shall escape serious error?

It seems best to begin by trying to ascertain, if we can, something of the character of our Lord's public preaching. For all the books that have been written on the Gospels, this subject seems little considered. Any one who tries to imagine the daily life of Jesus and His followers may soon make the reflection that the Twelve must have known by heart many of His sayings. If they lived with Him by day and by night, and listened incessantly to His public discourse for two or three years, or even for a single year, they could not fail to become familiar with the more striking sentences. As He moved from town to town, and from village to village, the same themes must have recurred twenty or a hundred times; the same language, the same illustrations, must have been employed again and again. If this did not suffice to fix a great deal in the memories of His companions, they had a still more effectual aid; when they went all over the country as His deputies they were compelled to reproduce His sermons. What else could those raw fishermen, and others equally raw, proclaim to the farmers and shopkeepers who thronged them? For all that we know, Peter may now and then have practised

the art of preaching in the presence of his Teacher, and received His corrections. Had Jesus not promised that He would show him how to catch men? And was there never a day when the Master was fain to rest, and let the scholars talk?

We open the Gospels, and we find that of hundreds, perhaps thousands, of sermons addressed to the public there is scarcely any report. What is actually set down is a reply to a question or criticism, or else a comment or a rebuke, or a speech addressed to followers by way of instruction, cheer, or warning. In short, the words spoken once only have been handed down; while those which were often repeated in the long talks in the synagogues, the market-places, the houses where men and women thronged till they and He forgot the dinner-hour, such words are all blotted out.

The record of Christ's public preaching may be somewhat less meagre than it seems. Some passages in the Gospels which appear to belong to a special occasion may be detachable; and some speeches which fit special occasions may have been re-delivered, with variations, many times. The tendency of recent criticism is to find "doublets" everywhere, and to reduce events and authentic utterances to a minimum. But in the busy life of our Lord similar events and similar conversations abounded; there is small doubt of this. And if there was any wealth of tradition, our evangelists may often have omitted when they might well have added. For example,

Luke was acquainted with the parable of the Pounds, and he may have thought it needless to insert the similar one of the Talents. Or it may have seemed to him that Jesus spoke but one parable, recorded in two versions, whereas an apostle could have told him that there were four or five similitudes of this character. Luke records nothing of Mark's scribe who inquired about the chief commandment, because, most likely, he had a better story of his own about a lawyer who inquired about eternal life, and got a similar answer, with an appendix, the parable of the Good Samaritan. Commentators sometimes reduce these incidents to one, and they may be right; but, with the well-known anecdote of Hillel in view, it is a plausible conjecture that during the ministry of Jesus questions about the commandments may have been raised a dozen times.

Evangelists may sometimes have identified two or three incidents or sayings that were originally distinct, or they may have amalgamated them; or again, they may have put in a definite setting words that sounded in the ears of many a crowd. Yet we return to our surprise that of the public preaching of our Lord there is so little memorial. In the Acts of the Apostles attempts are made to reproduce the speeches of Peter, Stephen, Paul, and others. Luke, in his Gospel, makes no corresponding attempt. He describes a service in the synagogue at Nazareth, but without any summary of the discourse, or any example of the manner in which Christ preached

good tidings to the meek, proclaimed liberty to the captives, and bound up the broken-hearted.

Matthew and Luke report the "Sermon on the Mount", and although Matthew's version is longer, and derived, apparently, in whole or in part, from a separate source, yet the order is the same in both Evangelists, and this indicates that from pretty early times quite a long speech was attributed to Jesus. But even if it had all been delivered on a single occasion, which most critics consider improbable, it would not pertain to our present subject, since it was not directed to the public, but to disciples surrounded by a crowd within earshot.

We are at least acquainted with one of the texts of Jesus, "Repent, for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand". Is there any trace of sermons on this text, or upon any other? One day a number of men came with the tidings that Galilaeans who had gone to the temple had been slaughtered at the very altar. They told it with bated breath expecting, as we should have supposed, that the Prophet would burn with wrath at the profanity and cruelty of the Roman Governor. Not so; their notion was that Jews who had perished in such dreadful circumstances must be sinners beyond the common. Sinners they were, replied Jesus, and so were the men of Jerusalem on whom the tower of Siloam fell. But their sin was not exceptional; nor was their punishment exceptional. Your guilt is similar to theirs, and, unless you repent, a punishment like theirs awaits

you all. Do not misread the lesson. God is sparing you now, as a fruit-grower spares a barren fig-tree, in the hope that, after another season's care, it may bear fruit; if it does not, he will cut it down (Luke xiii. 1-9).¹

The teaching of our Lord may have been frequently interrupted by invalids such as the paralytic who got himself lowered through the roof of a house where an audience was assembled. Of some interruptions He was not tolerant. He spoke sternly to a man who wished Him to settle a dispute about family property. Then, turning the disturbance to profit, He made the listeners see in a picture the man's folly and their own; it is the folly of the prosperous farmer who lays up stores of grain, and merrily plans for years and years to come, never dreaming that this very night God's voice will bid him part with all forever (Luke xii. 13-21).

We are reminded of the lesson taught in the latter half of Matthew's sixth chapter; and if we were bent upon finding another summary of a sermon on this aspect of the subject of Repentance, we might take that portion of the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. vi. 19-34; cf. Luke xii. 22-34) as an exhortation on the text, Do not let your minds be engrossed with eating, drinking, dress, and money-making; but set your hearts on the Kingdom of God and His righteousness, assured that He cares for all

¹ In this passage Jesus does not deny, but rather asserts, a connexion between suffering and sin.

your wants. There is no evidence, however, that such words were addressed to any public audience. Both in Matthew and in Luke disciples are the listeners.

Luke tells us that as Jesus was slowly making His way towards Jerusalem, some one asked Him whether it was true that only a small number were saved. He answered the question indirectly, and turned to all who were present. Make sure of salvation, He urged; for the door is narrow. And make haste; for the day is coming when the Master of the house will rise to shut it. Then you will cry, Lord, open the door and let us in. And He will answer, I know nothing of you. You will say, We sat with you at dinner; you spoke upon our streets. Away with you, says He, ill-doers that you are! O what weeping and chagrin there will be when patriarchs and prophets and strangers from all lands sit at the feast, and you are shut out! Yes, Jesus seems to warn the people, you are the hosts to-day, and I the wanderer, dependent on your bounty; but the awful time may come when you will desire to sit at my table and I will say you nay (Luke xiii. 23-30).

The Parable of the Pounds (Luke xix. 11-28) might be regarded as a sermon to the people on the need to prepare for God's Kingdom; but Luke appears to combine two illustrations, and we can have no great assurance that the original setting is preserved.

The above-mentioned passages may, if we please,

be regarded as piquant extracts from sermons, or summaries of sermons, on Repentance. At least they help us to imagine how our Lord preached upon this theme.

Did the mass of the hearers regard themselves as good men and women who had no need to make any change? They were well pleased with their own piety and virtuous conduct. They justified themselves; for they were honourable as compared with others, especially as compared with the disreputable fellows of whom Jesus was so fond. Luke narrates that Jesus, on a certain occasion, addressed those who relied on their good character; and the Parable of the Pharisee and the Publican is apparently the gist, or crowning point, of another call to Repentance (Luke xviii. 9-14).

Our Lord marked with concern many thoughtless hearers who had no searchings of heart as to sin or the performance of duty. Their souls were a shallow soil. They resembled the ill-clad wedding-guest of Matthew's parable. Luke relates that on one occasion the Saviour was stirred by the sight of the throng at His heels; for He turned round to speak to them. They took themselves for followers; but they did not apprehend the greatness of leaving all for Jesus' sake. They were engaging in a war, were they? They had not gauged the strength of the foe. They were putting up a tower; but they had neglected to estimate the cost of the building, and they were not aware that as yet they had laid down only a stone or two. Did

our Lord enlarge upon this theme? When He was alone with His disciples He sometimes talked upon kindred topics with a solemnity that makes us shudder (Luke xiv. 25-33).

We have nearly exhausted the list of passages that may, if we choose, be taken as specimens of public preaching. It is a curious fact that Luke turns out to be our chief authority. Does this suggest that part of his material was derived from a person, or persons, who did not belong to the inner circle, but had often stood in the crowd?¹

It is almost startling to notice how much the theme of these extracts resembles the theme of John the Baptist's preaching. It is commonly taken for granted that the public speech of our Lord was in strong contrast to the speech of John, or that, if He opened His ministry with the text "Repent", He quickly turned to other subjects. But our extracts do not indicate a transition. And when, after a long apprenticeship, no doubt, the disciples were sent abroad, they preached that men should repent, according to Mark (vi. 12), while Luke and Matthew say that they were enjoined to preach the Kingdom of God (Luke ix. 2; Matt. x. 7). Preaching on John's text, or something like it, must have been extensive and long-continued. To some of the people,

¹ Loisy and other critics have suspected that some of those short public speeches in Luke's Gospel are compiled from scattered sayings. This is conjecture; and, in any case, Luke greatly helps us to see how Jesus may have preached.

therefore, it may have looked like a carrying on of John's work, when he was put into prison. They did not guess at random when they supposed that Jesus was no other than the Baptist.

This was just what Jesus was not. He did not baptize. The immersion in the Jordan was a great innovation; for it demanded that circumcised Jews should one by one confess their need of cleansing, if they were to be ready for the Reign of God. Yet the Baptism of John, which Jesus evidently regarded as "from Heaven", was abandoned by Him. If we may follow the Fourth Gospel, He permitted His disciples to continue the practice for a time; but to all appearance there were no baptisms in Galilee.

Why did Jesus give up this practice? Presumably it was because the work of His predecessor was not thorough enough. John could not be ignorant of the importance of motive, any more than the Old Testament prophets were ignorant of it. But a reformer always finds it an easier and quicker method to pay attention to the act, and John, like the prophets, seems to have been more concerned with the fruit than with the root. Some of those who paid him a visit were urged to bring forth fruit meet for repentance. Did he clearly recognize that a corrupt tree cannot bring forth good fruit? (Matt. vii. 18). Judging by the homely advice which in Luke's Gospel he is said to have administered to soldiers, tax-gatherers, and the well-to-do, this austere prophet was not hard to please. But what

was the worth of a mere renunciation of flagrant wrong in the sight of One whom the keeping of the Ten Commandments failed to satisfy? Did our Lord perceive that many or most of John's converts were not truly penitent?

Jesus differed from John not only in His omission of baptism, but in His manner of reaching the people. He did not restrict His activity to one place, as Isaiah, Jeremiah, and the old prophets seem usually to have done. Nor, like John, did He stay in a sparsely peopled district, waiting for hearers to arrive. Such a method was appropriate to one who, with all his concern for the individual, was perhaps like the earlier prophets, chiefly intent on moving the nation. Jesus, with the aid of His healing powers to draw men, might well have adopted the same method if His aim had been the same. But He took a plan that was quite new: He sought the Jews in their towns and scattered villages, as if He had a care for all, for busy men who could not quit their work, and for sluggish men who would not, for women and children who could not travel far, and even for each single soul.

Quite probably John shared the belief of some Jewish teachers that if all Israel could be brought to repentance the Redeemer would appear. To this end His baptism was well adapted: it was like the signing of a solemn league and covenant. Manifestly it was the desire of Jesus that the Kingdom should come nigh to every town and to every person; but

it is not so certain that He hoped for a mass movement. It is not certain that National Repentance would have had any meaning for Him. From several utterances we might infer that almost at the beginning of His ministry He abjured any general, comprehensive aim. He explained that He came not to call the righteous but sinners. Again, He compared Himself with a shepherd who has lost one sheep or a woman who has lost one coin, and seeks till the lost is found. We must beware of squeezing too much out of these expressions, but they scarcely sound like setting up a Kingdom of God or even creating the right conditions for its supernatural appearing. They are unlike any utterance of John, who did not seek sinners at all: publicans and sinners sought him.

Montefiore, whose words about Jesus are sometimes more valuable than those of Christian commentators, remarks that to associate with the sinner in order to win him was something new in the religious history of Israel.¹ But did Jesus deliberately spend time in seeking to gain bad characters? Or were they so moved by His public discourse that they sought Him, as the woman who was a sinner did, when He, maybe, was in search of Simon the Pharisee and his guests? He was jeered at as the "Sinners' Friend": so He Himself acknowledged.

¹ See Montefiore: *The Religious Teaching of Jesus*, p. 57 (quoted in H. R. Mackintosh: *The Originality of the Christian Message*), and cf. his *Synoptic Gospels* 1st. ed. p. 86; 985 and *passim*.

This appears to imply close companionship. We actually know that on one occasion, when many respectable homes would have opened their doors for Him, He preferred to lodge with a publican. If, from time to time, He gave Himself to the special task of saving godless people, it is difficult to believe that He aimed at a national movement, or that His thoughts of the Kingdom were those of the old prophets, or of John, or of writers who dreamed of a sudden, supernatural beginning of God's Reign.

If we can find in the Gospels only a few suggestions as to the manner in which Christ preached Repentance, we have even less information as to His preaching of the Kingdom, or the Reign of God. The Evangelists tell of a notable day when He stepped into a boat to address the dense crowd on the lake shore. From the boat He spoke one parable at least, namely the parable of the Sower. Perhaps He spoke several more which Mark did not choose to record; for we read (iv. 10) that the disciples "asked of Him the parables". Certain it is that this one parable was no more than an element in the teaching from the boat. With every imaginable expansion, the telling of it would occupy only a few minutes. Even if all the parables strung together in Matthew's thirteenth chapter were enlarged with rich details, and told on a single occasion, they would still be so brief that the Story-teller would be no sooner into the boat than out again.

There is no good reason to doubt that Jesus

explained to His followers the parable of the Sower, as Mark states. Still, the crowd must have taken some sort of meaning out of the picture. Did it form the preface of an address, and did it convey to some, at least, the lesson that they ought to try to forget their shops and their crops, and fix their attention on the Speaker's words?

It is much easier to imagine how the parables of the Treasure and the Pearl might be employed. An address on the Kingdom might reach its culmination in them. Why, Jesus seems to say, are your thoughts so set upon food and clothing, upon luxury and wealth? What shall it profit a man if he gain the whole world and lose his own soul? How great is the joy of those who sit down in the Kingdom of God with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob! Such happiness is worth any sacrifice. Why, for the sake of a Treasure or a rare Pearl a man will gladly part with everything that he possesses.

Some such parable as that of the King's Banquet (Matt. xxii. 1-14) may have been used on a different occasion to convey the lesson of the Treasure and the Pearl in a negative form, and to let men see what loss they incurred by slighting the invitation of the Great King.

What could the crowd understand from the parables of the Mustard Seed and the Leaven? Not very much. But they would get an inkling of the fact that the Kingdom of which Jesus spoke was not, as they and John imagined, a world-empire, suddenly

established in power; rather it was something that grew quietly, and perhaps secretly, from a small beginning. This would suffice to let the unspiritual see that they had little to expect from the Prophet of Nazareth, while those whose appetite was whetted by the parables of the Treasure and the Pearl would ponder what they heard.

Is it by chance that in this group of parables there is repeated mention of sowing? Jesus did, indeed, employ the metaphor of reaping when He urged His disciples to pray to the Lord of the Harvest. But the parables of the Mustard Seed, the Sower, the Seed that springs up of itself, and the Tares, are, in actual fact, perhaps in intention, a gentle correction of John's preaching. The farmer comes to fell the tree, cries John. He comes to plant, says Jesus. It is harvest-time, cries John, and the farmer is standing on the threshing-floor, with winnowing-fan in hand. It is seed-time, says Jesus; the day for burning chaff, or bundling tares, is still far off. John, and probably the followers of Jesus, who wished to call down fire from Heaven on unfriendly folk, took it for granted that as soon as the Messiah appeared He would root out every wicked person from the world, and set up a Kingdom of Saints. Jesus said, No.¹

I am struck with the fact that the more public preaching of Jesus, so far as we can cull it from the

¹ The parable of the Tares has, apparently, no reference to the Church.

Gospels, is fitted to awaken curiosity, or to arouse alarm; while it imparts little instruction in regard to the nature of the Kingdom, or the method of entrance, and very little in regard to God¹ and the Saviour. Would it be rash to conjecture that the public utterance of Jesus has been little preserved partly because it was, somewhat like John's, elementary and even preliminary?

This teaching of Jesus sheds light upon His own precept, "Give not that which is holy unto dogs." We are apt to be disregarding of the precept, and perhaps we injure the unspiritual by indiscriminate giving. (How much ought to be imparted to a raw heathen audience?) Jesus, apparently, withheld all deep instruction where there was no readiness for it; even "saving truth" seems usually to have been reserved. For example, when Jesus said that what went into a man could not defile him, but what came out of him did, the people were not curious enough to seek an explanation, and they got none (Mark vii. 14-23). Modern commentators sometimes contend that no explanation was required; probably, however, they much overrate the spiritual intelligence of average Jewish minds, brought up on the Old Testament. A non-Christian audience of Chinese would make nothing whatever of such a paradox; and ancient Jews, though far more enlightened, might readily be puzzled.

¹ It has been remarked that in His public speech, so far as this has been recorded, our Lord did not name God as Father of men.

On more vital matters than clean and unclean meats, Jesus was silent when we might have expected an explanation. He spoke of the "strait gate", but left His hearers to guess the meaning of the phrase. We could wish that some one had inquired. When the lawyer questioned Him as to the means of obtaining eternal life, our Lord referred him to the two great commandments of the Old Testament. Had he not pressed Jesus with the demand, Who is my neighbour? he would have learned nothing more. Even then what he heard was only a story to arouse his conscience, with the parting admonition, Go, and do thou likewise (Luke x. 25-37). The rich young man received similar treatment when he asked the same question. But he was not to be put off with any conventional reply. The keeping of the commandments had not brought him "eternal life". "One thing thou lackest", said Jesus at last, "go sell whatsoever thou hast . . . and come follow Me" (Mark x. 17-21).

In His intimate conversations with disciples the Master disclosed but a little of His mind. He knew how to keep His secrets; and John apprehended His meaning, if he did not report the actual words of Jesus, in the declaration, "I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now" (John xvi. 12). The Gospels present vivid pictures of the awe with which His followers looked upon the One who was their closest companion. They sometimes ventured to put a question, and received a

reply which they only half understood; but they were afraid, it seems, to press the matter. If they were satisfied with the answer about the leaven of the Pharisees (Mark viii. 14-21), or about Elias coming and restoring all things (Mark ix. 11-13), or about the eagles flocking to the place where the corpse lies (Luke xvii. 37), they must have surpassed our own generation in power of apprehension. Sometimes they were afraid to ask any question at all. As He went on His way to Jerusalem, not merely the Twelve, but the crowd, were seized with amazement and terror at His aspect (Mark x. 32). The disciples would fain have learned the meaning of "rising from the dead" (Mark ix. 10) and of the prophecy concerning betrayal, death and resurrection; they had to be content to discuss such matters among themselves (cf. Mark ix. 31-32). Not one, it seems, had ever the courage to ask this mysterious Person, Who art thou? They could but exclaim, What manner of man is this! (Mark iv. 41). It was He at last who questioned them about Himself. And no one ventured to inquire why He must suffer and die.

The public preaching of Jesus is not, perhaps, such as we expected to find it when we set out on our inquiry. At least it is not such as I expected. Who can fail to be awestruck when he reads in succession those warnings and appeals of Jesus? Till we place them side by side, we scarcely realize how solemn they are. Who but must feel rebuked by

their earnestness? The pulpit utterances of the present day, as compared with those of an earlier generation, are, on the average, more interesting and vivacious. But they seldom appeal to the conscience. Have we, indeed, got "back to Christ"? Do we, as Christians, share His mind? Do we, as preachers, feel the horror and danger of worldly and self-satisfied lives; and do we bring it home to our hearers until they too begin to share "the terror of the Lord"?

There are, of course, many other elements in the more private teaching of Jesus; but the present theme has forced upon our attention a subject which at all times, especially in our daily life, we are tempted to ignore. We are driven to pray without ceasing for the gift of courage, that we may never be ashamed of Christ and His words, and that, whether in public or in private, we may never seek to please men, and cease to be the servants of Christ.

"THEY REPENTED NOT"

It is perfectly true, as Denney says, that faith takes a far more prominent place in the New Testament than repentance does.¹ This, however, is not true of the Gospels, or of the earlier chapters in the Acts, where we read, not more of repentance than of faith indeed, but much more of saving repentance than of saving faith. Our Lord's chief commendation of the

¹ *The Christian Doctrine of Reconciliation*, p. 285.

sinner is that they repented; His chief complaint of the rulers and of the people at large is that they repented not. What are we to understand by the declaration that if the mighty works which had been done in Chorazin and Bethsaida had been done in Tyre and Sidon they would have repented long ago? It meant, in the first place, that the miracles would have produced greater effect in Heathen cities than they had done in His own country. This striking utterance, taken along with several others, surely indicates that, in spite of appearances to the contrary, our Lord did not regard the Gentiles as shut out of the Kingdom of Heaven. Tyre and Sidon would not have remained obdurate had they enjoyed the opportunities of Galilee.

In the Book of Jonah the great Heathen city of Nineveh repented; for, when the prophet foretold that forty days later the town would be destroyed, the citizens, from the highest to the lowest, fasted and clothed themselves in sackcloth, turning from their evil ways. Even John's preaching was not without results. The population of Jerusalem and Judæa flocked to the Jordan, confessing their sins, and, no doubt, promising amendment, because they heard that the Messiah was at hand, to bless the righteous and destroy the impenitent. While Pharisees and rulers disbelieved in the imminence of any such event, and held aloof, even publicans and harlots were baptized. On the whole, however, our Lord seems to have judged that John met with much

opposition and disdain. For He tells how men said that the ascetic preacher of the wilderness was possessed by a devil.

The visible effects of our Lord's work must have been less than those of John's preaching. There was no decisive movement in the large towns. The populace liked to hear Jesus speak; they wondered at His words of wisdom and authority. But, presumably, they went about their business just as before, and just as if the one object in life were to lay up treasures upon earth. They indulged their passions as if there were no prophet among them. The Synagogue services, we may guess, were as formal and barren as heretofore. And perhaps they were no better attended than in days gone by.

What was the cause of this indifference? Was it that Jesus did not alarm His audience, as John had done? The parable of the Barren Fig-Tree and other sayings already alluded to make it evident that He did alarm them. Besides, there was a solemnity in His utterances which made them more impressive than the fiery denunciation of the Baptist. Yet withal, our Lord seems to have eschewed everything sensational or spectacular. We are probably justified in interpreting the parable of the House empty, swept and garnished, and then reoccupied, as a picture of the people temporarily cleansed by John's work, and afterwards becoming more defiled than ever. From at least one other passage it is apparent that Jesus was dissatisfied with the Fore-

runner's achievement. He Himself sought not merely to alarm the crowds, but to charm them with fair pictures of the Kingdom as a treasure, a pearl, and a banquet. He had compassion on them, we are told, and taught them many things (Mark vi. 34). And His whole life was full of friendliness for all sorts and conditions of men. He was ready to enjoy the pleasures of the table with lovers of the Law, and just as ready to eat and drink with despisers of it. No one turned to Him for healing without receiving the boon which he craved. Rich or poor, good or bad, clean or unclean, Jew or Gentile, it mattered not. He was as kind to the ruler of the Synagogue as He was to the poor woman who had spent her last penny on drugs. Yet nothing availed. This is an extraordinary fact. Is there anything like it in history? Would it not be surprising even on the mission field?

It does not seem likely that He expected a general movement. Many of His sayings, from first to last, seem to point in another direction. And it is incredible that such a One as He was could have spent half a lifetime in Nazareth without learning much of the ways of men. As, in the first years, He mingled with the children and, afterwards, with the youth of the town, He could not but observe that many, or most of them, were far from God's Kingdom. Nor could He fail to mark the pride and selfishness, the covetousness, deceit, and malice of His fellow-townsmen, the listlessness and insincerity of those

who sat at His side in God's House. Is it imaginable that during all those years He made no effort to bring them to a better mind? Had He no experience of their hardness? Did He not learn from the ill-will of His own brothers that a man's foes are those of his own house? Was He not aware, long before He began to preach, that many were called, but few chosen? Yet He might well have expected that there would be some notable response as the issue of all His work.

We would fain get an answer to the inquiry, How did Jesus preach repentance, and how did His very ignorant disciples do it? Even nowadays, as is evident both from what Jews and from what Christians write about repentance, there is no general consensus of opinion about the purport of the term. We can scarcely suppose that Jesus, in the style of John, called upon His hearers to make open confession of their faults, or bade the publicans cease their extortions, and the soldiers abandon their violence, and the merchants relinquish their unfair profit, or that He was content to invite those who were better off to share their comforts with the needy. But were His disciples capable of preaching anything better? If Jesus ever preached in such a fashion, it could only be by way of introduction to some more penetrating truth. We see, in His intercourse with individuals, how He led them on from the shallow to the deep, according to the response which they gave Him.

What was the deeper truth to which He would lead them? We might conjecture that it was the yielding of the will to God. But, to anticipate what is said in our next chapter, this is not exactly how He deals with individuals. In two or three instances He speaks first of the commandments: when the rich young man presses his question, What shall I do? he at last bids him sell all, and become a follower. Something like this, apparently, was the goal of the call to repentance. He complained that the cities repented not although they had seen His mighty works. As His miracles ought to have convinced the Pharisees that the Kingdom of God had arrived, and as they ought to have convinced John that He was the Coming One, so they ought to have guided the people of Galilee to a like conclusion. What did Jesus look for? He could scarcely expect or desire that large numbers of the people should quit their business and their homes to wander about with Him. But was there no means by which they could signify that they cast in their lot with Him, that, at the very least, they were on His side? It is here that our information is lacking. We cannot well doubt that a considerable number of men, women, and children, who never shared His journeys, were heart and soul for Jesus, and that He knew about them.

We may assert with a good deal of probability that Jesus seldom or never worked any miracle as a sign. This, however, is not the same thing as saying that

the miracles did not become signs after He had worked them. Of course they were such. So Jesus speaks of His miracles as Paul does of his when he protests that his "signs and wonders and mighty works" are "truly the signs of an apostle" (2 Cor. xii. 12; Rom. xv. 18-19). If men were wilfully blind when they refused to hearken to Jesus, they were much more so when by His conquest of nature He proved His divine authority. They were like the Gentiles portrayed in the first chapter of Romans, who received manifold tokens of God's everlasting power and divinity in the works of nature, and yet became vain in their reasonings and darkened in their heart. It was nothing but prejudice that kept the Galilaeans from confessing that God had visited His people. And if the Twelve arrived at the belief that Jesus was the King, the people ought, sooner or later, to have reached the same conviction. Because they did not seek the Kingdom of God and His righteousness, they remained blind.

Perhaps there was incipient faith and repentance in not a few individuals. Jesus pronounced the harvest a plentiful one, and deplored the lack of labourers. Presently He sent forth unskilled labour to do the best that could be done in the circumstances. Our imagination is stimulated and baffled when we try to picture the preaching of the disciples as they went forth two and two. Their Master led them to expect that they would sometimes be repulsed. Why? Was it because some of the villages

were utterly godless, and had not the faintest desire for religious revival? Or, perhaps, their fear of the government made them unwilling to give any countenance to revolutionary teaching. They did not wish to have anything to do with a second John the Baptist. Or, again, they may have harboured a dislike to Jesus Himself; and the disciple was not above his master.

Evidently many of the villages gave a welcome to the messengers. As miracles were always wrought in the name of Jesus, a kindly reception of the envoys was tantamount to an admission that He was a prophet. Was it never more than this? It is difficult to believe that, after listening to preaching about the Reign of God, accompanied by miraculous cures in the name of their Leader, the villagers never raised the question, Who is He? Now, or later, they were driven to strange uncanny guesses: He was the Baptist, or else He was one of the prophets. The majority of them, of course, were convinced that He was not the Christ. But could they avoid mentioning the Messiah in their comprehensive search for His title? Or could the Twelve quite suppress their growing conviction, and hide it from noisy debaters? It appears unsound to take the conversation of Jesus with the Twelve near Cæsarea Philippi as a touchstone for the genuineness of other sayings. The idea that He was Messiah could scarcely be new. It had probably occurred to the Pharisees, only to be dismissed as an absurdity. It had certainly occurred

to John the Baptist. As for the people, they were so stirred by the sights which they witnessed, that on one occasion they exclaimed, "Can this be the Son of David?" (Matt. xii. 23). It is needless to call attention to other passages bearing on the same theme.

The Twelve on their return recounted to Jesus all that they had done and taught. We may take it for granted that He used the opportunity to correct any mistakes made by them in their public teaching. Did they meet with any success? Luke relates that the Seventy returned boasting of their exploits in curing men in the name of their Lord. He too was jubilant; but reminded them that they had even greater cause to rejoice in their own salvation. There is not a word about the repentance of the villages.

It is profoundly interesting to note that what did at last work repentance in many of the people, both in Jerusalem and throughout the land, was the news that He whose invitations and warnings they had scouted, whom at last they had put to death, never a Galilaean stirring hand to rescue Him, was raised by God Himself, and was now exalted to give repentance and remission of sins. Here indeed was sin: they had cursed and crucified God's Anointed. Here indeed was grace: He had died for their sins; their abounding wickedness had not finally estranged their God from them. On the contrary, it was now that His salvation was near and sure.

CHAPTER II

WITH INQUIRERS AND DISCIPLES

THE words of Jesus in His more familiar intercourse with inquirers and disciples still bear upon the subject of entrance into God's Kingdom; but they no longer give the general command to Repent. They deal with the subject in such a bewildering variety of ways that ordinary readers and scholars alike have differed greatly as to the gist and sum of the directions. When the rich young man asks what he is to do in order to gain eternal life, which, as the subsequent talk with the Twelve shows, is for Jesus the equivalent of entering the Kingdom, he is at first simply reminded of the old commandments dealing with a man's duty to others. On one or two occasions Jesus brings together the two Old Testament commandments of Love to God and Love to Neighbour which are already found apart in the Books of Moses. Elsewhere, however, He plainly intimates that the performance of the "Ten Words" is insufficient, and that what He expects of His followers goes far beyond the avoidance of murder, adultery, and perjury, for it reaches to the thoughts and passions of the heart. And it is by no means enough to love one's neighbour as oneself; those who would be God's children must love their foes.

Such teaching looks beautiful to those who regard it as a picture of ideal conduct; but to those who ask

how it is to be put into practice it seems terrible. The New Testament is immensely more exacting than the old. Modern Jews are well aware of this when they spurn the precept, "Love your enemies", as imposing too great a strain upon human nature, bending the bow till it breaks, requiring what is impossible, or what ought not to be required. And Huxley knew it well, when he expressed his preference for prophetic Judaism as the only religion that appealed to him, and when he boldly confessed that he loved his friends and hated his foes.¹

It is obvious that no earnest seeker can rest here. Is the reader not surprised that serious thinkers are often content to expound the Sermon on the Mount as Christ's Gospel without making any attempt to show how sinful men may have power to obey? Is it not surprising that preachers are sometimes content to intimate that the spirit of love can be acquired, or that it may be acquired by a daily remembrance of Jesus? When, however, we examine the first three Evangelists, we are forced to acknowledge that if they give guidance on the matter it is not very obvious. We may be told that Jesus bade men trust in the power and love of the Heavenly Father. But what He said about this was chiefly in relation to God's providence, and His readiness to grant good things in answer to prayer. It affords little help to the person who asks, How am I to

¹ Life, ii. 181, 339.

subdue anger or lust? How can I love those who regard me with hate?

It is a notable peculiarity of the Gospels that they make very sparing mention of God as a source of spiritual power. In the Lord's Prayer the suppliants beseech God so to work that His name may be honoured, and His rule prevail. For themselves they implore that their sins may be forgiven, and that they may not be led into temptation, but delivered from evil. In Luke's version the petition for deliverance from evil does not occur. To the Lord's Prayer not much can be added from the Gospels. Jesus once said, "Watch and pray that ye enter not into temptation." And in Luke's Gospel He is reported to have promised that the Father would give the Holy Spirit to those who asked (Luke xi. 13). Have we never tried to persuade ourselves that Luke, not Matthew (vii. 11), gave the correct version here? Have we not rejoiced in the prayer of our Lord Himself, as reported by Luke, "Simon . . . I have made supplication for thee that thy faith fail not"? (Luke xxii. 32). Where indications are so meagre, we clutch at anything.

The Christian who looks to these Gospels for copious suggestions of spiritual aid from the Heavenly Father will certainly be disappointed. And his disappointment will be keener, if he realizes that the Old Testament, which may appear to him far less spiritual, has, in some of its portions, much more to say on this subject than the Gospels have. We

recall the promise in Deuteronomy that when the Lord turns the captivity of His people He will circumcise their heart to love the Lord their God with all their heart (Deut. xxx. 1-6). There are similar words in Jeremiah (xxiv. 7); and there is the memorable prediction of a new covenant bestowed by God, who writes His law in His people's heart (xxx. 31: cf. xxxii. 39-40). More memorable still is the promise in Ezekiel that when Israel is at last restored to Palestine it will be a holy people in a holy land; the stony heart will be taken away, and a new heart and spirit given (xi. 19; xxxvi. 25-27). Isaiah speaks in his sixth chapter of his own experience of cleansing, and this makes us wonder whether Jeremiah and Ezekiel, who knew their people's need, had learned to pray for a right heart and spirit to be given to themselves.

It is chiefly in the psalms that we meet with such petitions. Not that they are frequent; but those that do occur are notable: we find them especially in such psalms as the 40th, the 119th, the 139th at its close, and the 141st (verse 3), but most of all in the 51st, where the prayer for a clean heart and a right spirit speaks for all time. Moreover, there were Jews of a later period who understood how to ask for spiritual blessings. The Son of Sirach is not a lovable character, yet he shows us in the book of Ecclesiasticus (xxii. 27-xxiii. 6) that even he had learned this lesson. Pre-eminent is the author of the writing known as the 16th psalm of Solomon. His brief

account of God's search for a lost soul, and the prayer that follows, are alike astonishing. The writer is supposed to be a Pharisee, and it is conjectured that he took pen in hand only a few years before the coming of Christ.

It would be profitable to make quotations from these late Jewish writings, if we could count on the reader's indulgence; for it is necessary to keep in mind such words, and similar words of the Old Testament, if we would judge rightly of our Lord's teaching.¹ It cannot fail to strike anyone who duly weighs the matter that in the Old Testament where, as a rule, the moral demands are comparatively low, far more is said of Heavenly aid than in the Gospels, where the demands are immeasurably high. C. H. Toy and others have actually inferred from their study of the Synoptic Gospels that Jesus regarded man's moral powers as sufficient for everything required of him. But when we consider, on the one hand, the passages to which we have just been referring, and, on the other hand, the life of the Apostolic Church, so full of dependence on a higher power, it is impossible to suppose that Jesus, who stood between the Old and the New, was thus strangely at variance with both. No real way out of the difficulty is to be found if dependence on Jesus Himself is left out of account.

The assertion is frequently made that Jesus asks no one to believe on Himself; and, as far as words

¹ See the note at the end of this chapter.

go, the assertion is justified. The truth is that in our first three Gospels the words "faith" and "believe" are seldom used at all, except in connection with Christ's healing powers, or with reference to the working of miracles by disciples, or with reference to God's providence and answers to prayer. We need not lay great stress on such phrases as "Believe the Gospel", in Mark's opening chapter, or "these little ones who believe on Me" (Mark ix. 42; cf. Matt. xviii. 6), which may be no more than a correct paraphrase of Luke's "little ones" (Luke xvii. 2). Still, it is to be observed that Jesus did emphasize the importance of belief in John's preaching (Matt. xxi. 32, 25; cf. Luke xx. 5; Mark xi. 31). And in Luke's story of the woman who was a sinner, there occurs the abrupt announcement, "Thy faith hath saved thee" (vii. 50).

In this connection it is of some importance to recall the fact that even before the coming of Christ, the rabbis, in discussing the Bible, and especially the stories of Abraham and of the Exodus, exalted the merit of faith. The New Testament emphasis on faith is not a complete novelty.¹

Christ's demand for faith in His healing powers is represented in some recent commentaries, and elsewhere, as a demand for faith in God, or in the power of God working through His Messenger. This is not

¹ A. Schlatter: *Der glaube im Neuen Testament*, 3rd ed., pp. 609-611.

an accurate statement of the facts as presented in the Gospels. Jesus would never have denied that He was acting by the Father's authority, and in His strength; but He did not make this prominent, and it was only when charged with casting out demons by Beelzebub that He asserted the Spirit of God, or God's finger, as the power by which He prevailed. With reference also to the cure of the ten lepers, He exclaimed, "Were there none found to give glory to God, save this stranger?" (Luke xvii. 18): in this He acknowledged God as the ultimate author of the cure. He told His disciples that they could not hope to be successful in such a case as that of the epileptic boy unless they prayed (Mark ix. 29). And when He Himself looked to heaven and sighed, before curing the deaf and dumb patient (Mark vii. 34), this, perhaps, was silent prayer.

On the other hand, it is related that Jesus gave His disciples power over unclean spirits (Mark vi. 7; Matt. x. i; Luke ix. i), and, besides, Luke tells that the Seventy returned boasting in their victory over demons through the name of Jesus (Luke x. 17), while their Lord rejoiced at the news. On another occasion He inquired of two blind men whether they had faith in His power to give them sight (Matt. ix. 28). And when He bade the demoniac of Gadara go home and tell what the Lord had done for him, Mark almost certainly understood this to refer not to God, but to Christ's act of healing, for

he says that the man proclaimed what Jesus had done (Mark v. 20).¹

When Jesus rebuked the disciples for their fear in the midst of the storm, saying, "Have ye not yet faith?" the natural meaning is that they were at fault because, after witnessing so many of His wonderful works, they had no trust in His own protecting power. There is a similar rebuke when the disciples are disconcerted at the discovery that they have forgotten to take bread. Just then their Master bids them be careful to avoid the leaven of the Pharisees and the leaven of Herod (Mark viii. 14-20). They apparently take this as a warning against going to a Pharisee's shop for loaves. They might have known, says Jesus, that He Himself could furnish bread. Have they not seen how He fed the multitude?

Jesus is not afraid, as theologians often are, that the people may ascribe to Him the praise due to God. He never protests, It is not by my own power that I have made this sick person well. And when a commentator declares that "the works done by Jesus are always treated by Him as done by God through Him",² there is a wrong

¹ Bousset: (*Kurios Christos*, 96-97) makes the misleading statement that "Lord" is used but once by Mark to designate Jesus (Mark xi. 3). As a matter of fact, the title is used but once to designate God (Mark xiii. 20), except in quotation from the Old Testament, and even then the Evangelist, on one occasion at least (Mark i. 3, "Prepare ye the way of the Lord"), understands a reference to Christ.

² J. Vernon Bartlett: "St. Mark", p. 178, in *The Century Bible*.

emphasis in this assertion: truth is not advanced but obscured.

It would be an obvious perversity if we were to represent Jesus as disappointed with the townsfolk of Nazareth because they had not enough faith in God. He was surprised that, after hearing so much about His mighty works elsewhere, they despised and distrusted Himself; He was still a prophet without honour in His own country.

To our modern minds the surprising fact is that whether in relation to God's wonder-working power, or His own, Jesus was so much grieved when men's faith failed, and so elated when it triumphed. He saw in the Centurion's speech the harbinger of a world-wide reign of God. We should have been disposed to judge that a mere belief in Christ's healing power was of comparatively small value, and far removed from the spiritual aspiration which He expected of His followers. What difference, we ask, could it make to men's souls whether they had confidence to draw near for the healing of their bodies?

Allegory is so much in our blood that even nowadays many persons of enlightenment are scarcely aware of this problem: they see the soul touching the Saviour with the hand of faith, or doubting whether He will deign to welcome one so marred with the leprosy of sin. But our Heaven-soaring thoughts must have been far from the minds of most, if not all, of the sufferers. Even when we admit that

the miracles were not mere cures, and not mere signs, but part of the "message of the Kingdom", and that trust in the Lord's power was in some degree a reception of this message, we are still perplexed that Jesus should value miracle-working faith thus highly. Was it partly because He discerned the promise, or at least the possibility, of a nobler species of faith? Experience constantly shows us, even in opposition to our preconceived opinions, that men and women are not always, or perhaps often, drawn to Christ by the finest motives. Those who begin with a mere desire for health, or prosperity, or for escape from some fettering habit, are by and by enticed to a far higher level, until they become willing to part with health, and with life, for Jesus' sake.

If our Lord was so overjoyed at faith of a lower order, how much, we exclaim, He must have valued a pure spiritual trust! And now we are puzzled. For He does not bid men believe in God, nor does He bid men believe in Himself, for the saving of the soul. This is not because He taught that men should beware of an over-anxious concern for their own souls, and should pay more heed to social salvation; the Gospels bear witness that it was far otherwise. Yet when we ask, What must I do to be saved? it may appear to us that we are only confronted with rules which sinful men can never obey. Then we read that Jesus kept company with ungodly and ill-doing men and women, and that, as He

Himself acknowledged, this behaviour won for Him the name of "Sinners' Friend". Nothing abashed, He professed His desire to be with them, as a physician is with his patients, to seek them, as a shepherd seeks his strayed sheep, and to yearn for them, as a father yearns for his undutiful son. Indeed, He went so far as to say that He came to call sinners, as if this were the main business of His life. Still more, He forgave sins, and maintained His right to do it. But what is implied in such expressions as "calling sinners"? And what bridge shall we find between the Boundless Grace of some portions of the Gospels, and the Boundless Requirements of others? When the "law" is laid down, not a word is said about power to keep it.

Has the reader never felt that Grace and Law lie side by side in the Gospels, unreconciled; and does he not perceive that in many a book upon the teaching of Jesus the difficulty is ignored, or it is evaded by an interpretation which leans to the one side or to the other according to the writer's bent? The problem may seem to defy solution; and, as has already been remarked, the Gospels are not directories, but fragmentary notes. They really tell us next to nothing as to the manner of our Lord's dealing with sinners. But how can the cause of truth be advanced by that suppression of evidence which is so prevalent in our day?

It is time to observe that the instructions, or, at least, the bulk of the instructions, included in the

“Sermon on the Mount”, with kindred lessons scattered through the Gospels, are addressed to *Disciples*. The remark is obvious in the extreme, but very necessary; for although the fact is disputed by no critic, it is constantly forgotten by preachers and popular writers, and not seldom by critics themselves. The “commandments”, if we call them such, are imposed upon a set of persons who have forsaken all to follow Jesus, who are hated and reproached “for the Son of Man’s sake” (Luke vi. 22), who are named “the salt of the earth”, “the light of the world”. Everything turns upon this. How can confusion be avoided when it is not steadily borne in mind?

If the reader turns to the Epistles he will find confirmation and illumination there. We take less notice of the legal element in the Epistles because it is usually reserved for the close; but in Romans, First Peter, and Ephesians there are long lists of very exacting rules. Some of the injunctions of the concluding chapters of the Epistle to the Romans recall the severest demands of the Sermon on the Mount. Yet neither Paul nor any other was careful to explain that fulfilment required Divine aid. The Epistles were addressed to men and women who could do all things because they were “joined to the Lord”; they were “in Christ”; they “lived by faith in the Son of God”. This great fact was taken for granted when superhuman tasks were laid upon them.

Something similar is to be taken for granted as we read the Sermon on the Mount; although we must bear in mind that, as we shall see in future chapters, the secret of power was not at first fully disclosed, and even the Twelve may have felt that obedience was impossible. It is of cardinal importance to remember that "the law of Christ" was laid upon those who had already become attached to Him. For all that we know to the contrary, the Evangelists may occasionally have inserted into such monitions a few sentences designed for a wider audience; and, of course, the multitude sometimes overheard an intimate conversation; they appear to have listened, at a distance, to the "Sermon on the Mount". In the main, however, the preaching for the crowd was of quite a different character, as the previous chapter has perhaps shown.

We are now better able to judge whether Jesus required men to believe in Himself. Those who treat the subject in a mechanical fashion, as if they were content to turn up a concordance for the words "faith" and "believe", may easily conclude that for the soul's salvation He required no such faith.¹ Has it never occurred to them that in such phrases as "Come to Me", "Follow Me", "Forsake all and follow Me", "Receive Me", "Confess Me", and still

¹ Schlatter's work on Faith in the New Testament (*Der Glaube im Neuen Testament*) has its value very much affected by this mechanical limitation. And negative writers, such as Bousset, have not been slow to infer that Jesus asked no one to believe in Himself.

more in the extraordinary phrase "Renounce self and follow Me", there was a demand for faith far more insistent and unmistakable than there was in the words of Paul to the jailer, "Believe on the Lord Jesus, and thou shalt be saved."

The reader may have asked, as I have often asked, why our Lord in His work of healing made so much of faith and belief, and in His preaching and teaching in regard to salvation dispensed with such words. The answer seems to be that to obtain a cure, faith in His power was enough; there was no need to *follow*, or to be joined to the Lord in any way: but to enter the Kingdom, to gain eternal life, faith of a far higher order was needful; it could not be expressed in a more concrete, lively, and unambiguous fashion than in the sentence, "Forsake all and follow Me." Such language was no longer appropriate when Jesus ceased to dwell among men. Yet even then "believe" was not the one term used; there was great variety of language, and some of it reminds us of our Lord's own speech. In the Epistles we read such phrases as, "ye received Christ Jesus", "he that is joined to the Lord", "call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ", "confess Jesus as Lord", "ye are Christ's", "hath the Son", "have fellowship with Him", "know Him", "abide in the Son", "in Christ", "put on Christ", "Christ in you", "through Christ".

No one doubts that in the Apostolic age the Church worshipped Jesus as Lord, and that leaders and

followers were of a mind in acknowledging Him as the source of all their spiritual life. Many theologians chide them for this, and charge them with causing confusion by setting Jesus side by side with God, so as to introduce a double object of faith. They boldly invite us to return to the simpler religion of Jesus, who by precept and example showed men how to trust in God alone, and to yield obedience to His will. Yet no one who reads the Gospels with an open mind can infer that the purpose of Jesus is conveyed in such expressions. *For every word that He speaks about the Father, He speaks two about Himself*: and what strikes the unbiased reader most is that one whose attitude to the Father is unmeasured reverence and love still presses His own claims with unwearied insistency, and seems at times to eclipse the Most High. One of the extraordinary notes of His speech about Himself is that when He may well announce the authority of God He refrains from doing so; He prefers to appear in His own name.

Our Lord, in much variety of speech, indicates the need for attachment to Himself. The rich young man who professes to have kept all the commandments is still outside the Kingdom; for he will not sell all and follow Jesus (Mark x. 21). The scribe, who heartily agrees that love to God and love to neighbours is the chief thing, is told that he is not far from the Kingdom of God (Mark xii. 34): he lacks something; he does not yet follow Jesus. Even John, the greatest of all prophets, is less than the

most insignificant of those who acknowledge the Coming One. Happy the man, exclaims Jesus, who is not alienated by anything that he finds in Me (Luke vii. 23; Matt. xi. 6).

Of such unspeakable importance is the attitude to Jesus that men are judged by the treatment of His followers and messengers. His most despicable adherents have powerful friends at Court. Better to be drowned at once than do anything to hinder or harm them (Matt. xviii. 6, 10). The towns that reject His messengers shall receive a judgment more terrible than that of Sodom and Gomorrha (Matt. x. 15 and Luke x. 12). The smallest kindness shown to the least of them shall meet with reward (Mark ix. 41 and Matt. x. 40-42). And when the Son of Man sits on the throne of His glory, and judges all mankind, separating them as a shepherd separates sheep from goats, sentence will be passed in accordance with their behaviour towards His followers, the brethren of Jesus.¹

¹ Matt. xxv. 31-46. This passage is popularly applied to the treatment of *all* the hungry, sick, and suffering. But it may be seen by comparison with the passages just cited, and by comparison with Mark iii. 35, that such could scarcely be our Lord's meaning. Besides, if this solemn prediction dealt with deeds of kindness or unkindness in general, how could anyone be judged? Almost all men, whether civilized or savage, would be put among the sheep for some performance, and among the goats for some neglect. It is an attitude towards Christ's representatives that forms the matter for judgment.

The authenticity of the passage has been questioned on insufficient grounds.

It cannot but occur to us to ask whether our Lord speaks thus to all generations of men. Or was it merely to the Jews of His own generation that He so addressed Himself, because He was a Jew by birth, and expected to reign over a glorified Jewish kingdom? In regard to this it is to be observed that even if He had expected to sit on the throne of David, yet, as prophets had predicted, and as Daniel and dreamers of later time foresaw, His kingdom was to be world-wide. Moreover, those passages in the Old Testament which speak of the Servant of the Lord are explicit and emphatic on this point, and Jesus regarded Himself as the Servant of the Lord. Besides this, the Kingdom and the King, as Jesus hinted at them, were so glorified, and so far above all earthly sovereignty, that they were worth the loss of home, friends, and life itself: in fact, the Kingdom of God was "treasure in Heaven" and "eternal life". Such a Kingdom outspans the bounds of space and time. Can the demands of its King be confined to one race, and to one brief day?

Every one must feel how disproportionate to any temporary or national situation are the announcements of Jesus regarding Himself. He comes to cast fire upon earth, and to create discord in families. His call is so urgent that neither living nor dead may stand in the way of obedience. Home, property, the nearest and dearest, life itself, must be freely abandoned for His sake. Jesus sets forth, with a deliberate and terrifying recklessness, the tribulations

that await His adherents. You will be brought before rulers for My sake, He foretells; and then the Holy Spirit will speak in you. Every one will hate you for your adherence to My Name. You need not be afraid: the very hairs of your head are numbered. What! Is there no risk of death? Risk! To lose life for My sake is to find it. Happy those who are persecuted for righteousness sake! Happy those who are reproached, hunted down, miscalled, for My sake! Rejoice and exult! Your reward in Heaven is great.¹

It is possible that some of the forewarnings of danger and distress may have taken a little of their colour from later experience. But Christ's Self-assertion is to be found in great variety of circumstances, and in many forms. To see what you see, to hear what you hear, He exclaims, is a happiness that the old saints longed for. A greater than Jonah, a greater than Solomon, stands in your midst; think what you must answer for if you remain unmoved. The attitude to Me, He says, is everything: Happy the man who takes no offence at Me! What could be more dreadful than the guilt of betraying the Son of Man? Better never born than sin in such wise.²

"It is a settled point with Jesus", says J. Weiss, "that the attitude to His person and to what He

¹ Luke xii. 49-53 and Matt. x. 34-39; Matt. viii. 21-22 and Luke ix. 59-62; Luke xiv. 25-27; Matt. x. 16-31 and Luke xii. 4-12 and Mark xiii. 9-13; Matt. x. 39 and Luke ix. 24; Matt. v. 10-12 and Luke vi. 22-23.

² Matt. xiii. 16-17 and Luke x. 23-24; Matt. xii. 41-42 and Luke xi. 31-32; Matt. xi. 6 and Luke vii. 23; Mark xiv. 21.

proclaims is decisive for life and bliss. He is conscious of expressing to mankind God's last and highest claim; after Him comes nothing more. The man who does not venture to decide for Him decides against God, and with that decides his own fate."¹

It may now occur to us to suggest that our Lord insisted on allegiance to Himself, simply because He was God's Representative and Revelation, a visible Image of God, and not at all because He was our Way of Access to God. For example, He said, Whosoever receives a follower, because he is a follower, obtains the reward that followers win: and whosoever receives a follower receives Jesus, and whosoever receives Jesus receives God who sent Him (Matt. x. 40-42). Might it not then be enough to receive God direct or, as we put it, trust in Him as Father, and yield obedience to His will? Having learned our great lesson from Jesus, might we not cease to lean on Him? Might we not, so to speak, dispense with the scaffolding? No. Jesus never yields His place. "Every one", He proclaims, "who shall confess Me before men, him will I confess before My Father in Heaven. But whosoever shall deny Me before men, him will I also deny before My Father who is in Heaven" (Matt. x. 32-33 and Luke xii. 8-9).

We have seen, in the many passages cited, the awful urgency of Christ's claims. Is it possible to account for this urgency if His complete Gospel

¹ *Die Schriften des Neuen Testaments*, p. 153.

was summed in "The Prodigal Son"? Is it possible to account for this urgency, or to justify it, if His chief or perhaps His sole aim was to make known the love of the Father? Prophets, psalmists, and holy men of ancient time, by their precepts, and by their self-denying acts and heroic endurance, revealed God's love to men. To receive their revelation it was quite needless to own any allegiance to them. Jesus, by His words, His life, and His death, revealed in a superlative degree God's love. Why should those who receive His revelation be obliged to pay express homage to Him? Why be compelled to admit His Divinity, or even His sinlessness? Is it not enough to confess that God has manifested Himself in many ways, and that His manifestation of Himself in Jesus Christ is the best of all?

Jesus as the Revealer of the Father is an enticing picture. Who but has felt its fascination? It is a true picture so far as it goes; but, taken alone, it does not present the Jesus of the Gospels. For, in the Gospels, His chief purpose is to draw men to Himself as the sole means of entrance to God's Kingdom, the sole means of approach to God. And He implies, in two or three of His utterances, that He cannot, or will not, make a *real* revelation of the Father except to those who have joined themselves to Him.¹

Jesus imposed upon His followers a standard impossible for flesh and blood. *Apart from what He*

¹ See Mark iv 11-12; Matt. xi. 27 and Luke x. 22. Cf. Matt. xvi. 17.

taught as to union with Himself, He gave scarcely any clue to the method of fulfilment. That our first three Gospels are so reticent regarding power to obey seems to me to be a fact puzzling in the extreme; and I am astonished that theologians and critics pass over it so lightly. I confess that I do not altogether understand why our Lord said so little even with regard to the meaning of attachment to Himself. Yet no sooner was He gone than His followers began to attain His standard, as Stephen in his dying hour made manifest to all. And by and by the fiery Paul learned the same lesson. "Being reviled we bless", he declares; "being persecuted, we endure; being defamed, we entreat" (1 Cor. iv. 12; cf. 2 Cor. xii. 10). Paul and his contemporaries attributed everything to faith in Jesus. To us it may appear simpler and more logical to go direct to the Father whose love has been revealed in the Son. But is it certain that our logic is sound? Is it certain that our Lord and His followers were mistaken?

No one needs to be reminded that the notion of Christ's intercession is fraught with difficulty. The difficulty is not new; but it has gained force through the weakening of the authority of the New Testament. It no longer suffices to affirm that some Apostle taught it, or that the Church taught it from the beginning. On the other hand, it is quite unfair to charge the immediate followers of Jesus with corrupting or complicating His simple Gospel. Certain it is that He taught men to regard attach-

ment to Himself as the one thing needful for salvation: if texts here and there are regarded as doubtful, or as coloured by the Evangelist, this makes not the least difference; nothing short of wholesale suppression could overturn evidence so abundant and so varied. There has been such a deplorable lack of candour in this matter that scientific criticism of the Gospels is quite a rarity. Far better to proclaim frankly that Jesus was mistaken as to His own significance than to garble or suppress His witness.

Why should Christ's claim appear unacceptable to religious minds? There are few devout persons who question the value of Intercession. We are often startled as we own to ourselves that the spiritual welfare of others may hang upon our efforts to do them good, and, still more, upon our intercession for them. Unless influence and prayers are illusion, we must judge that through this means God saves the world; yet withal, we are persuaded that He Himself inspires our prayers, and makes our influence effectual by the working of His Spirit. That the intercession of persons so loveless as ourselves should have any meaning for a God of love seems past belief; nevertheless all history attests the fact.¹ Has the Intercession of Jesus no meaning for God? Our age has explored the humanity of Christ: but theology makes less and less use of this discovery; rather it falls back on the old Greek onesidedness, and looks upon Him as a mere theophany, or mani-

¹ Explanation by telepathy is quite inadequate.

festation of God's love. And is Jesus, as a human being, to count for nothing? (One would infer from many a theological treatise that He was not a man at all.) If the petitions of erring men are so necessary that Jesus Himself bade His disciples pray for a supply of labourers, why should we be loth to acknowledge that God, who is the Author of salvation, and needs none to plead with Him to have pity, cannot achieve His purpose for the world apart from the prayers and pleading of the whole earthly life of the Son of Man?

How often we request our friends to pray for us! Must we scruple to approach the Friend of Sinners, or restrain our joy at the thought that in God's presence He confesses our name?

Our age, which has explained much, has acquired the habit of expecting to explain everything. But Christianity does not explain the world. It creates new problems; and perhaps it creates as many as it solves. It is enough at present to suggest that when we regard the Lord Jesus as our great Intercessor we are true alike to His own teaching and to the common experience of Christian life.

The purpose of Jesus would certainly not be achieved if those who became united to Him failed to attain the righteousness of the Kingdom. We observed already that shortly after the Resurrection the followers of Jesus began to achieve impossibilities. And they have been doing so ever since. There is no

command in the Gospels that has not received the most glorious fulfilment. Some of the most illustrious examples have occurred among uncultured races, as when, for example, a negro has manifested the utmost kindness to one who was but recently his cruel master; or cannibal savages, once deadly foes, have sat side by side at the Table of the Lord. There is no limit to the self-sacrificing love of Christians. I often think of that saint of the Early Church who had himself sold to a company of play-actors, and so wrought upon them by the heartiness of his lowly service that they were all converted to the faith. More wonderful still was the Moravian missionary who sold himself that he might share the misery of the blacks and bring them to God. These glories do not blind us to the beauty of Christian character as we see it in ordinary circumstances everywhere. We could almost exclaim that Christ Himself must be astonished at the fruit of men's faith in Himself.

What a future awaits the Church of Christ! If the Gospel, very imperfectly understood, has accomplished so much, what will it accomplish when among all the saints there is some real approach to the mind of Christ! I am not thinking of the Christian attitude to War, Social Reform, or Social Legislation. These subjects deal rather with debatable inferences than with interpretations of the Gospels, and they concern the community, or the Church, rather than the individual. But nearly all Christ's

teaching was for the individual; and the individual may at once act upon it, without waiting for society.

It was soon remarked of Jesus that He kept company with irreligious and disreputable men and women. And He Himself expressly announced that He came to call sinners, and to seek and save that which was lost. Can it be said that the followers of Jesus resemble Him in this respect? To be sure, there are in all our cities members of Christ's Church who spend their lives in caring for those that have no care for themselves; and the results are incredibly great. Yet the Church does not give her strength to this service. Although appalling estimates are often made of the number of churchless people in our land, scarcely anyone seems to be appalled. Few go to seek them and bring them back. How seldom, even in our public prayers, we pour out our hearts to God on their behalf!

Men do not now jeer at Christ for seeking sinners. Yet in most Christian minds there is, I think, a sort of kindly contempt for such work. Does this appear exaggeration? Is it then exaggeration to assert that the Christian people of our land do not expect the ablest ministers of Christ to devote their lives to this service? Yet no one who earnestly desires to follow in the footsteps of Jesus can have any doubt that it is the chief business of Christians, and of those whom, in especial, we name the servants of Christ, to care for the lost. Leave the churchgoers alone, rather than fail in this. Seek the churchless, rich and poor, and

compel them to come in that God's house may be filled. What! Neglect the Christian congregation? "Doth He not leave the ninety and nine in the wilderness, and go after that which is lost, until He find it?"

Are there not within the Church strayed sheep? There are. But is this acknowledged in the worship of God's house? A strange satanic lethargy has fallen upon us. How far this is from the mind of Christ anyone may feel who reads and ponders His words, the most thrilling words that have ever been spoken.

There is a subject very much in the minds of men, especially of non-churchgoing men, at the present time, namely wealth and the use of wealth. Multitudes of Christians in all generations have felt the influence of the life and words of Him who, though He was rich, yet for our sakes became poor. Many a man of great possessions has cheerfully left all for Jesus' sake. Many a one who might have become rich has been content to remain poor. Many a one with a lordly income has spent almost everything upon others. Many a man of moderate means, many a poor man or woman, has stinted self that others might have enough. Yet within the Church such persons are eccentric. Christian people in general do not imitate them, nor do they hold it to be their duty to imitate them. Among the most devout there is no prevailing opinion that the present state of affairs is far wrong. On the contrary, those who

are pre-eminent are ever assuring their comrades that our Lord did not condemn wealth.

Did our Lord condemn wealth? Several of His utterances appear to bear this meaning; and the easy explaining of hard sayings is much to be dreaded. All the facts must of course be weighed: and we must not disregard the talk in the upper room, as Luke reports it; in this, apparently, the disciples are enjoined to quit their life of poverty and of dependence upon friendly listeners, since their work henceforward is to be carried on in very different surroundings. Yet while we seek to interpret and ponder isolated texts, we are not solely guided by these. The words of the Old Covenant, taken up and reiterated by Jesus, are ever sounding in our ears, "Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself", He says; and "Whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, even so do ye also unto them." Above all, we consider Him who came not to be served but to serve. And then we see that many Christians, not to speak of others, are meagrely fed, meanly clad, and cramped in narrow rooms, while their fellow-Christians dwell in spacious houses, surrounded by fair gardens. How can we refrain from asking whether this is pleasing to our Lord?

This is no case of poor against rich, or rich against poor. What everyone may perceive is that rich and poor and men of moderate income are all of the same mind. They seek their own, and see no harm

in this ambition. The poor desire to be better off; the well-to-do thank God that He has prospered them, and devise new ways of spending money on themselves and their families. We use, and use to the full. Each asks, What can I afford? But how many ask, What can I do without? or feel ashamed to be enjoying luxuries which are beyond the reach of others?

Is it not strange that after so many centuries have passed the law of Christ has so little weight with His people? It is not that they have an ideal, and fail to carry it into practice; rather it is that they do not possess the ideal. But may the time not soon come when men and women of moderate means will begin to consider whether they ought to be so well housed and so comfortably fed, whether they ought to lay out so much on dress, on pastimes, on travelling, and on the education of their children, while others are forced to be content with a bare sufficiency, or with less than enough? The war forced many to alter their style of living; taxation has forced many more; social legislation may soon work havoc on the incomes of the middle class. But must Christians wait for war and law to compel? "The love of Christ constraineth us."

Christ has triumphed everywhere. Yet His triumphs have only begun. Is it not amazing that those whose character is unselfish, lovely, and Christlike are still so much swayed by custom and tradition in the spending of their substance, so

fixed in their persuasion that most of it ought to be devoted to themselves and their families and friends, so unready even to ask what Christ would have them to do? For many, to be sure, it might be a great upturning of their affairs if they were to ask this question. But already they have experienced the greatest upheaval possible; for they have renounced self and they prefer Christ to everything in the world. They could not be Christians if it were not so. It will be like a new dawn for the Church when all the saints, not one here, and another there, begin to share His mind. And if in such simple matters as the love of neighbours and the love of sinners we begin to think the thoughts of Jesus, will He not vouchsafe to us such an insight into His Gospel as the Church has never known?

NOTE

It would be highly instructive if we could form for ourselves some picture of personal piety about the time of Christ. Was the custom of private prayer common, or universal? "Josephus represents it as incumbent on every Jew to pray twice daily".¹ But John the Baptist taught his disciples to pray just as if they were children, and as if they had been little accustomed to anything like regular prayer for themselves, or, at least, as if they did not know

¹ W. Fairweather: *The Background of the Gospels*, 2nd ed., p. 28.

how to offer spiritual prayer for themselves. How interesting it would be if we could learn what John taught them to say! Jesus gives in Luke's Gospel a specimen of a Publican's prayer and a Pharisee's Prayer. Was the Pharisee's prayer typical, or were the members of his sect accustomed to make request for spiritual blessings? When Paul discovered that conformity to the law against coveting was beyond his power, did he cry to God for help? Or was it true, in a strict sense of the words, that he and his kinsmen sought to establish a righteousness of their own?

We have the good fortune to be acquainted with two very remarkable prayers for spiritual aid, which belong to the period before Christ's coming. The first was composed about two hundred years before the Christian era; and the standpoint of the author appears to be not very unlike that of a Sadducee. In spite of Greek influence, he shows himself to be an ardent advocate of the Law. The Son of Sirach is not a lovable character; yet he utters a prayer which, for its sense of spiritual need, far excels most of the Old Testament prayers. "Who shall set a watch over my mouth", he asks, "and a seal of shrewdness upon my lips, that I fall not from it, and that my tongue destroy me not? O Lord, Father and Master of my life, abandon me not to their counsel: suffer me not to fall by them. Who will set scourges over my thought, and a discipline of wisdom over mine heart? . . . O Lord, Father and God of my

life, give me not a proud look, and turn away concupiscence from me. Let not greediness and chambering overtake me; and give me not over to a shameless mind" (Ecclesiasticus xxii. 27-xxiii. 6).

The second example of late Jewish piety is attributed to a Pharisee. His brief account of God's search for a lost soul, and the prayer which follows, are alike astonishing: no one can read without praise to God. We refer to the writing known as the 16th Psalm of Solomon. "When my soul slumbered [being afar] from the Lord", says this unknown poet, "I had all but slipped down to the pit. When [I was] far from God, my soul had been well-nigh poured out unto death, [I had been] nigh unto the gates of Sheol with the sinner, when my soul departed from the Lord God of Israel—had not the Lord helped me with His everlasting mercy. He pricked me as a horse is pricked, that I might serve Him; my Saviour and Helper at all times saved me. . . . Rule me, O God, [keeping me back] from wicked sin, and from every wicked woman that causeth the simple to stumble. . . . Protect my tongue and my lips with words of truth; anger and unreasoning wrath put far from me. Murmuring and impatience in affliction, remove far from me, when, if I sin, Thou chastenest me, that I may return [unto Thee]. But with goodwill and cheerfulness support my soul; when Thou strengthenest my soul, what is given [to me] will be sufficient for me. For if Thou givest not strength, who can endure chastisement with

poverty?" (Ps. Sol. 16, in Charles: *Apocr. and Pseudep.*).

The words just quoted were penned, it is judged, only a few years before the coming of Christ. It is more to the purpose, perhaps, to observe that some of the most spiritual petitions in the Jewish prayer-book are thought to go back to the time when the Temple was standing. Those who asked Jesus for a lesson in prayer may from childhood have listened in the synagogue to such words as these: "O our Father, our King . . . put it into our hearts to understand and to discern, to mark, learn and teach, to heed, to do, and to fulfil in love all the words of instruction in Thy Law. Enlighten our eyes in Thy Law, and let our hearts cleave to Thy commandments, and unite our hearts to love and fear Thy name, so that we may never be put to shame."¹

It may appear to the reader that there is nothing extraordinary in the prayers which have been quoted. Probably he is unaware that requests for spiritual aid, which to a Christian are a chief element in religion, are very uncommon in the Old Testament, while in Pagan religions they are rare or quite unknown. Among savages they scarcely occur; the exceptions are so dubious that they prove the rule. The ancient Roman sought for material help, but never for help to live aright. The same, apparently, may be said of the ancient

¹ *Jewish Prayer-Book*, p. 39, ed. by S. Singer and I. Abrahams.

Egyptian. In Babylon, however, the record of prayers for deliverance from wickedness has been discovered: even Nebuchadnezzar beseeches his god to lead him by the right way. For the Greeks, as a rule, religion was a matter of ceremonial; yet here and there, especially among the philosophers, there were men who knew what it was to look to the gods for succour in the mastery of evil passions, and for nobility of heart.

In ancient India men entreated their gods for good harvests and large families, and for victory in war: there were some, also, who asked that they might be well-doers before the gods. Soon after the dawn of the Christian era Hinduism began to feel the influence of Christianity, so that it may be hard to determine what is native and what is Christian in Hindu conceptions. Certain it is that Indians have again and again attributed great moral change to the gracious power of some deity. Yet, withal, the average Hindu prays for temporal blessings alone. As for the Chinese, whether ancient or modern, they do not implore the gods, except for health, wealth, long life, and many children.

CHAPTER III

THE WORD OF THE CROSS

It is frequently asserted that the death of Jesus on the Cross was the inevitable conclusion of His life. This is a theory imposed upon the facts; it is not an inference from the Gospels. Honour required it, we are sometimes told. But the sentiment of honour as popularly understood is foreign to the spirit of our Lord: it would be unseemly to compare His devotion of Himself to that of the captain who resolves to perish with his ship, even when he has opportunity to escape. It is by no means evident that the work of Christ's ministry demanded His last visit to Jerusalem; the Gospels do indeed mention His teaching there; but they give the impression that He went, not to live and work, but to die. If, however, His work called for the visit, a genuine sentiment of honour, or, rather a fidelity to His task, could not have hindered withdrawal when it became manifest that His life was endangered.

Jesus went up, it is sometimes said, to offer Himself as Messiah. I do not think so. He went, claiming to be Messiah, which is a different thing. There is nothing in the narrative to suggest that He hoped to be accepted; and there is nothing to suggest that He was either accepted or rejected. How, indeed, could He look for allegiance in Jerusalem, if, as Luke relates, He wept over the

city and predicted its ruin? There was some stir as He entered, and much stir when He cleansed the Temple. But this action was not followed by any startling summons, or by a single word of hope. Jesus taught in the Temple, just as if nothing had happened. Facts like these are so remarkable that some critics refuse to admit any intention to claim Messiahship. However this may be, the real rejection of Jesus came at the very close, when the mob was persuaded to shout, "Crucify Him". Even this was a rejection by the rulers and the rabble, rather than by the whole city: the authorities had been afraid to make an arrest during the feast, lest there should be a rising of the people. Or we may reckon that the fatal decision had been taken long before; "How often", exclaimed our Lord, "would I have gathered . . . and ye would not" (Matt. xxiii. 37 and Luke xiii. 34). It is uncertain, however, whether this lament refers to previous visits, such as John describes, or to the whole period of Israel's history.

Jesus could not make an offer that was merely formal; the very suggestion is distasteful. But what hope could He cherish that a real offer would find a general response? He had spoken of "the strait gate", and the few who found it, of the many called, and the few chosen. The present generation, He declared, was open to no sort of influence; the austerity of John and the geniality of the Son of Man had alike failed to move it. He had already made thorough trial of the great cities of Galilee, and had

found them impenitent. Had He the faintest reason for expecting that it would prove otherwise in Jerusalem? He was well aware that the Messiah whom He claimed to be was not the Messiah for whom the nation yearned. He set it beyond doubt when He decreed that tribute must be paid to the Emperor: a man, He signified, might be a member of God's Kingdom and a subject of Rome at the same time.

If Jesus went to the Capital hoping against hope that the people, or a good part of the people, would declare themselves in His favour, why did He not retire when hope departed, and when, by His speech, and, maybe, by His lodging outside the town, He had made it plain that He was acquainted with the murderous schemes of the rulers? Did He look for some miraculous interposition when the clouds were at their darkest? There is never a hint of such an expectation. All is solemnity, and a settled foreboding of suffering and death.

Is it likely that any theory will prevail, when it runs counter to the plain drift of the narrative, not to speak of the verdict of the earliest Christians, as embodied in the New Testament generally? We know very little of the mind of Christ, and to us it may appear not very easy to understand how He could go deliberately to the place where He expected to be crucified, in obedience to His Father's will. But is it not better to confess ignorance than to build fantastic theories on the slenderest foundation?

With what purpose did our Lord go to meet death? It has been conjectured that His offering of Himself to His foes was a carrying out of His own precept, "Whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also"; that by returning His best to those who gave their worst, and His love to those who gave their hate, He expected to win a wicked and malignant world; that, in short, He anticipated, in His voluntary death, the apostolic precept, "Overcome evil with good". There is charm in this conjecture; and, what is more, the love of Christ for His enemies has proved itself a great converting power. If our Lord Himself had uttered the saying, "Overcome evil with good", we might have felt assured that it expressed some part at least of His purpose. Paul may have been quoting, or paraphrasing, some word of Christ, when he gave the precept (Rom. xii. 21). Yet the Gospels fail to give the impression that such a thought was uppermost in our Lord's mind, even if it was present at all.

Jesus does not speak, as we so often do, of winning men by love. The modern medical missionary aims at converting men by kindness. Jesus, in His works of healing, seems usually to have no object in view beyond that of relieving discomfort. Being moved with compassion, He cannot refrain from exercising His power to bless the bodies of men. So He says to the disciples, "Freely ye have received, freely give" (Matt. x. 8). Yet He does indicate with great

emphasis one result which His miracles ought to have produced; *as proofs of divine power*, they ought to have moved men to faith and penitence. They ought to have convinced the Pharisees that the Kingdom of God had come upon them; they ought to have convinced John the Baptist that He was "The Coming One"; they ought, as "mighty works", to have brought the cities of Galilee to penitence. Our Lord's disappointment at the want of faith in His wonder-working power is seen at Nazareth, and in the storm on the lake. And His delight when faith was found is shown in the story of the Syro-phœnician woman, and still more in the case of the Centurion. In view of such things, it is the more remarkable that He does not upbraid the people for refusing to be touched by His kindness.¹

When Jesus bade His disciples love their enemies, He did not promise that love would vanquish hate; when He bade them part freely with coat and cloak, and go a second mile, if forced to go one, He appears to have had no eye for the effect of the action, but only for the rightness of it. It was for his own sake, rather than for the sake of the poor, that the young man was enjoined to sell all and give to them. The

¹ Schlatter (*Der Glaube im Neuen Testament*, 3rd ed., p. 182) makes the interesting remark that in the Synoptic Gospels faith brings miracles, but in John's Gospel miracle produces faith. So it is worth remarking that in the passages just cited (Matt. xii. 28 and Luke xi. 20; Matt. xi. 2-6 and Luke vii. 18-23; Matt. xi. 21-24 and Luke x. 13) our Lord Himself affords ground for the view presented in John's Gospel.

motives urged in Christ's great demands may be put into words such as these, Do it because you ought; Do it for your soul's sake; Do it for Jesus' sake. Our Lord can scarcely have failed to consider the blessing that might reach the heart of the evil-doer when he received good for evil. Yet He does not seem to have spoken of it; and His silence is remarkable, or astonishing, if He looked upon His own work and sacrifice in that light.

We have thus, it seems, no direct evidence in the first three Gospels that our Lord hoped by His willing death to move men's hearts. Yet He may have cherished this expectation. Or, again, the softening of hearts may have been the design of the Father, not fully disclosed to the Son. As a matter of fact, what Jesus in the Gospels most insists upon is that His suffering is a necessity. Suffering and death are a cup handed to Him, a baptism awaiting Him. The Son of Man, He declares, goeth as it is written of Him. It would be no irreverence to conjecture that the full meaning of the Cross was hid even from our Lord.¹

At present we wish to discover, if possible, what our Saviour Himself disclosed as to the purpose of His death. We are at once struck with the overwhelming importance of this event in His own mind. It was something to which He looked forward with mingled dread and expectancy, as expressed in the words, "I have a baptism to be baptized with; and

¹ See Mark viii. 31; ix. 12; cf. x. 38; xiv. 36, 21.

how am I straitened till it be accomplished" (Luke xii. 50; cf. John xii. 27). The reader feels, so to speak, that His death is the one event of His life. It is something that must be, since it is ordained by God. And Jesus announces the awful fact that it is predicted in Scripture. Several passages in the Old Testament might seem to point to this. But it is pretty generally agreed among scholars that Jesus applied to Himself the prophecies of Isaiah regarding the Lord's Servant; and such prophecies, more than any other, must have been in His mind.¹

Was it from the study of Isaiah (liii. 12) that our Lord learned a doctrine repugnant to the common understanding, the necessity of dying in order to reign? Is it not much more likely that the terrible truth, so unwelcome to flesh and blood, was directly revealed by the Father, and then confirmed by a study of Scripture? The disclosure appears to have come to Himself at a very early date. Several writers, including Denney, Moffatt, and Ernest F. Scott, have pointed out that in the words heard at Christ's baptism there is already the combination of ideas, This is my Son, as in the Second psalm, and, This is my Servant, in whom I am well pleased, as in the forty-second chapter of Isaiah. Whether this implies that Jesus even then knew Himself to be the *Suffering Servant* seems not quite certain; since

¹ See such passages as Mark i. 11; ix. 12; x. 45; xiv. 21, 49; Matt. xi. 5 and Luke vii. 22 (the Servant of Isaiah lxi. 1; cf. Luke iv. 21); Luke xxii. 37.

the application of one verse to Christ might not involve the application of all passages on the Servant to the same Person. A Jewish Targum (Aramaic rendering of Hebrew Scripture) of that period interpreted the Suffering of Isaiah's fifty-third chapter as referring to Israel's chastisement, while the deliverance by Intercession, and the Triumph, were regarded as spoken of Messiah.¹ Still, the Temptation that followed the Baptism is much more comprehensible if we suppose that already a path of suffering lay before the eye of Jesus. And His announcement regarding the removal of the Bridegroom came most likely at a very early stage, since the nonconformity of His followers in regard to fasting must soon have attracted notice, and their light-heartedness fits the beginning, when they had small apprehension of danger.

With what emotions our Lord must have mused on Isaiah's picture of Him who was given for a covenant of the people, for a light to the Gentiles, who hid not His face from shame and spitting, poured out His soul unto death, was numbered with the transgressors, yet bare the sin of many! If Jesus regarded Himself as the Servant it scarcely seems needful to debate the authenticity or the drift of the words, "Even the Son of Man came not to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom in place of many." How could He keep from saying this? If He did not say it, He must have thought it a hundred

¹ See G. F. Moore: *Judaism* i. 229.

times. And the general significance is obvious. If we must not demand too precise a meaning for "ransom", the tenor of Isaiah shows that the general idea of "deliverance" is too vague; and if we explain it by "redemption", we must take this word in a strict sense. At the very least we must infer that Christ's death takes the place of the death of many; and the natural interpretation is that the death of an innocent One exempts the guilty. Why do so many theologians and interpreters admit this grudgingly, or deny it altogether? Surely it was Christ's meaning: better to be frank, and admit Him wrong, than subtle, and explain Him away. But was He mistaken? As a matter of history, apart from theories of Atonement, the death of Jesus as a criminal has meant that multitudes of guilty souls have received the forgiveness of sin and escaped its chains.

The Lord's Supper has of late years become a theme of very great and far-reaching controversy, and it has not been idle controversy. I am tempted to rehearse the details, for they are full of interest; but they are too complicated for our present purpose.¹ If we reduce the authentic account to the shortest possible form, as admitted even by the most sceptical, we have abundant matter for reverent thought. Christ certainly said, "This is my body". It is an extraordinary and almost unbelievable fact.

¹ For a lucid account of most of these details the reader may be referred to Prof. G. H. C. Macgregor's *Bruce Lectures on Eucharistic Origins*.

In all the story of God's People it is without precedent. Well might the disciples have exclaimed, How can this Man give us His flesh to eat? The certainty is that in dying, and through dying, Christ gives Himself to His followers to be in them, "Christ in them". There is boundless suggestion here.

As we listen to the short sentence, we are almost struck dumb. For any expansion appears to be a contraction; and many of the explanations given are inadequate. We hear of a Passover to take the place of the Passover next day. But it is doubtful whether the Passover was observed on the following day, as John represents. Whether we follow John, or the first three Gospels, we must think it probable that our Lord had the Passover in mind as He made His gift; it is, however, utterly impossible that He or His followers took the Supper to be a mere substitute for a Passover. He who claimed to supersede Moses, who demanded allegiance to Himself as the means of gaining Life, was superseding the Passover, also, and eclipsing it, if He looked upon Himself as the Paschal Lamb. We hear, again, of a feast of fellowship, as if this could account for the amazing words! Or we are told that Jesus looked upon His death as the means of bringing in the Kingdom, and gave His body to the Twelve as a pledge of their share in His suffering and victory. This explanation may be nearer the truth. It implies, of course, that He viewed Himself as the Suffering Servant or, at least, that He regarded Himself in

the same light as Isaiah regarded the Servant, triumphing at last, because He poured out His soul to death, was numbered with the transgressors, and bare the sin of many (Isa. liii. 10-12). Yet why should Jesus make such an unexampled bequest? And how, if He uttered no word of comment, could the Twelve ever guess that the gift of Christ's body meant a share in His victory?¹ Is it not better to keep to the obvious and unavoidable meaning? He gave Himself, so He said. Any one could understand this saying; no one could fathom it: and that night, as in times gone by, the Twelve were afraid to ask for fuller instruction.

The expositor is embarrassed by the absence of anything in the previous teaching of Jesus that seems to be connected with the words at the Last Supper. Elsewhere He seems to make claims and demands, rather than gifts. To be sure, His life was a perpetual giving; but His bounty was healing and teaching; in our first three Gospels He does not say almost anything definite as to imparting Himself. He speaks, however, of the relief afforded to those who come to Him (Matt. xi. 28), and He bestows the forgiveness of sins. Above all, He declares, as we have seen, that He gives His life as a ransom. He gives His life: but in the Lord's Supper the gift of His body is definitely

¹ Even if we connect with the Supper the words in Luke xxii. 29-30, "I appoint unto you a Kingdom . . . and ye shall eat and drink at my table", we have little or nothing to explain our Lord's bequest of His body as pledge of victory.

made *to the disciples*. And this corresponds to the offering of themselves which they were required to make. As attachment to Himself was the one thing needful for entrance to God's Kingdom, so, at last, Jesus plainly intimates that He whom they have been learning to regard as the Suffering and Redeeming Servant, gives Himself to those who have joined Him, those who have continued with Him in His temptations (Luke xxii. 28). He seems also to intimate that He gives His life as a sacrifice on their behalf.

Did Jesus, at the Last Supper, make any mention of a cup, or compare it to His blood? This question has been frequently discussed, and no wonder. For some of the Early Christians used no wine, but only water, in their celebration of the Feast. Moreover, our accepted version of Luke mentions a cup twice, and the part of the narrative making mention of the second cup (from the middle of the 19th verse to the end of the 20th of chapter xxii.), looks like a fragment of Paul's narrative tacked on. What arouses special suspicion is that this part is absent from one of the principal manuscripts of Luke's Gospel, and from some old Latin translations. But if the shorter version be the correct one (which is very questionable) there is left mention of only a single cup, which comes before the eating of the bread;¹ and there is an allusion to the approaching Reign of God, but there is no mention at all of blood. Did Jesus, then, speak of His own blood?

¹ As in the *Didache* and the *Kiddush* (Jewish festal meal).

It has been said, in reply, that our Lord could scarcely have expected His followers to provide themselves with wine for every celebration, when, perhaps, not a day passed, or even a meal, without a remembrance of Him. To receive His body, it was quite enough to use bread. Luke's short or shortened form may have fitted this usage. But, as often as wine was used, the sacrament of the Cup was to be added to the sacrament of the Bread: Christ and the Covenant in His blood were to be brought to remembrance. Such, it may be, was Christ's intention in the words cited by Paul, "This do, *as often as ye drink*" (1 Cor. xi. 25).¹

Not to mention other replies, a far more interesting suggestion has been elicited by this debate. It is a well-known fact that Christians, from early times, were exposed to cruel slander, and that, in particular, the charge of mingling human blood with the bread of their feasts brought down upon them popular hatred and awful persecution. (Something similar happens in China to-day.) It would have been madness, then, if Luke had sent to Theophilus, a friendly Heathen, any book that could support such a charge. Upon the supposition that Mark's blunt form, "This is my blood of the covenant", is correct, Paul's form, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood", may be taken as a paraphrase designed to obviate misconception. Luke, coming later, or a second edition of Luke, yet later, shuns every

¹ Cf. Dalman: *Jesus-Jeschua*, pp. 142 ff., 162, 163.

reference to blood; he reckons it enough to mention Christ's death in telling of the broken bread. Last of all comes John: he omits the Lord's Supper altogether; but he significantly inserts, early in his Gospel, a discussion with the Jews, in which Jesus hints that literal eating of flesh and drinking of blood are not to be thought of (John vi).¹

For us at present the most impressive fact is that the utterance concerning Christ's blood is thus seen to bear a peculiar stamp of authenticity: it could not have been invented. To be sure, it has been argued that since the drinking of blood was abhorrent to every Jew, our Lord Himself could not have made any such declaration, and that, moreover, if He had made mention of a covenant, He would not have enjoined a ratification by means of a *cup*, since in the Old Testament the covenant was sealed by the *sprinkling* of blood (Exod. xxiv. 8). But is it possible to suppose that any Jewish Christian would, of his own accord, have put the saying into the mouth of the Lord? How could it find a place in tradition, since universal prejudice was against it? Could Mark, of Jerusalem, have accepted it, or imagined it? Could Paul, in a trance, have received, or imagined that he received, the revelation of words so foreign to his rabbinic mind, unless they were genuine? It has been argued that the first cup mentioned by Luke (the "eschatological cup", xxii. 17-18) may have become changed in tradition

¹ See, among other writers, Dalman: *Jesus-Jeschua*, pp. 142-4, 147.

into a cup that was a symbol of blood. Could this happen among Jews? Is it any easier to imagine a saying of such a character evolving itself in a Gentile Church? If a change of this sort did occur at Antioch, could it be accepted by Mark, the companion of Peter? What of Paul? In order to account for conjectural inaccuracy in his statements, it is frequently remarked that his chief epistles were penned a quarter of a century after the Resurrection. The remark seems not quite relevant.¹ Only half a dozen years after the Resurrection he spent a fortnight with Peter, and during that period he must have had his share in "the breaking of bread" (see Gal. i. 18). If, at a later date, he found, or established, at Antioch, a mode of observing the Feast different from that recognized in Jerusalem, how could he, or the Church, escape the censure of Peter, who was at Antioch then? (Gal. ii. 11). It is scarcely possible to doubt that the words concerning the cup and the blood come from our Lord Himself. And it is not unreasonable to suppose that the longer text of Luke, as we have it in our Bibles, gives the correct summary of events, while Mark and Paul have omitted mention of the first cup, because it had no place in the perpetual rite.

¹ There is a similar fallacy in the suggestion that Mark's facts are not quite reliable because they were recorded forty years after the Crucifixion. Mark may have got some of his facts before the Crucifixion, many or most of them he must have learned from Peter in the months and years following; and no amount of telling or re-telling could materially alter the stories, though it would tend to clear obscurities.

Jesus invited the Twelve to drink the cup which was the symbol of His blood! Both Paul and Mark mention a covenant in this connexion, and there is no reason to doubt that Jesus did so.¹ Obviously the language has an Old Testament flavour; and elucidation of Christ's meaning has been sought in the sacrificial blood of the Passover Lamb, in the covenant concerning moral laws which was ratified in sacrificial blood sprinkled upon God's altar and upon the people in equal portions (Exod. xxiv.), and in the covenant named, or implied, in expressions concerning the Servant of the Lord (Isa. xlii. 6; xlix. 8; implied in liii. 10-12). In Zechariah there is a sentence remarkable in itself, and in its context: "By the blood of thy covenant", so it reads, "I have sent forth thy prisoners out of the pit wherein is no water." These words immediately follow the description of the King riding upon an ass into Jerusalem: thereafter chariot, war-horse, and battle-bow fall into disuse; all contentions in Ephraim and Judah vanish and, speaking peace to the nations, the King rules the world (Zech. ix. 9-11).

It is not of any moment to decide which of these Old Testament passages was in our Lord's mind. For one who superseded the Law of Moses, whose least disciple surpassed the greatest of old-world saints, a mere repetition of the Covenant in the

¹ It is a mistake to suppose that there is specifically Pauline theology here. See J. Weiss: *Urchristentum*, p. 506; G. H. C. Macgregor: *Eucharistic Origins*, passim.

Wilderness, or any other covenant, was out of the question. His, assuredly, was a new covenant, and for this reason we may judge that Mark's version, "This is my blood of the covenant", and Paul's, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood", mean one and the same thing.

We may be tempted for a moment by the ingenuity or the novelty of some paltry views of the covenant: but they cannot be seriously entertained. A reminiscence of barbaric blood-covenants, long forgotten in Israel, appears singularly out of place. And surely the idea of binding the Twelve together at such awful cost cannot be the primary one. Nor is it very natural to think of a bond established between Jesus and the Twelve in His own blood. The covenant, apparently, is one made by God with men in the blood of Jesus.

Is it for the Twelve only? Many modern writers have maintained that as Jesus anticipated an almost immediate coming of the Kingdom, He had no thought of any repetition or perpetuation of the Supper. They observe that Paul is our sole authority for the command, "This do in remembrance of me", or "This do to call me to your remembrance".¹ The authority of Paul, who was probably in Jerusalem at the time of the crucifixion, and himself became a convert, as is commonly supposed, within two or three years, or perhaps less, cannot be so easily

¹ For this translation, cf. C. A. Scott: *Christianity according to St. Paul*, p. 191.

brushed aside. Quite likely he had witnessed the celebration of the Supper long before his conversion:¹ and when he began his opposition to the believers he must soon have learned a good deal of their ways. After his conversion, as we have seen, he had early and repeated opportunities of acquiring first-hand information.

Too much has sometimes been made of this question. Whether Jesus gave the order to renew the rite or not, it was natural and seemly that His followers should do so. And we cannot refrain from asking whether it is probable that the Servant of the Lord, who was bearing the sin of many, and was about to become God's salvation to the end of the earth, should give Himself to this handful of men, and to them alone, without so much as regarding the larger circle of men and women who had bound themselves to Him, and had right loyal hearts, as the Upper Room in Jerusalem was soon to prove. If Jesus gave Himself to the Twelve alone, are we not forced to assume that they received the gift and the covenant as Representatives, or Princes, of the Israel of God? (cf. Matt. xix. 28; Luke xxii. 30).

How little we know of the profound thoughts that were in our Lord's mind as He called His blood the

¹ Andronicus and Junias, the "kinsmen" of Paul, were "in Christ" before he was (Rom. xvi. 7). They are named "apostles", so that probably Jerusalem was their original home. If "kinsmen" is to be understood in a restricted sense, Paul may have seen the remembrance of Christ in their house.

covenant blood ! The paschal lamb, the covenant at Sinai, and the prophetic oracle of Jeremiah concerning a new covenant of grace, suggest, says Professor A. B. Bruce, in *The Kingdom of God* (p. 248), that His blood shields from the destroying angel, that it is the blood of a peace-offering which consecrates His people to the Lord, and, chiefly, that it is a sin-offering on the ground of which God bestows upon men the forgiveness of their sins. Perhaps our clearest inference from the words of Jesus is that He regarded the offering of His life and the shedding of His blood as the means of establishing a new relation between God and men. Certain it is that since the death of our Lord the character of religion has completely changed. The shedding of the Saviour's blood has brought in a new era, wherein trespasses untold have been forgiven, and prisoners uncounted have been delivered from the pit.

Many things in the life and teaching of Jesus set us wondering and debating. Among these is the fact that He appears to have spoken very seldom as to the meaning of His death. But however we may judge concerning this, we must not forget, as several prominent writers on the Atonement have done, that our Lord's sayings which speak of attachment to Himself, have an intimate bearing on the subject. It cannot be disposed of by explaining or explaining away an isolated text or two, such as that regarding the ransom.

Our present business is not to attempt a theoretical exposition of doctrine, but to set forth our Lord's own teaching. Yet we can scarcely refrain from adding a few remarks of a general character. For our generation, argued out of belief in vicarious punishment, has become afraid to think of Christ as a Saviour; and the ministers of Christ, being at a loss to know what to make of His death, have often found refuge in silence. This silence, as anyone may perceive, is injurious to Christian life. Yet the difficulty is real: in an age when every teaching has been shaken, the traditional belief in Atonement has not escaped, and even the most conservative of Christians express their faith in altered language.

It is true that arguments against Substitution are not new, and that in recent times they have lost a great part of their force. For biological and social science has shattered the old assurance that each individual stands alone. Philosophy has worked in the same cause. Anyone, for example, who has studied such a book as Bradley's *Appearance and Reality*, must feel how impossible it is to isolate or define a person. In its haphazard assaults upon such doctrines as those of Original Sin, Vicarious Punishment, and the like, popular Christian theology is somewhat out of date.

A belief in Substitution in some form or other has been prevalent in all generations of the Church. It is to be found in theories of Ransom from the Devil, Satisfaction to Divine Justice, or Divine

Honour, Sacrifice to God, and Vicarious Penitence (Christ's "Amen!" on man's behalf, to God's condemnation of sin). The old Moral Influence Theory, or Personal Influence Theory, which has come to new life in our time, involves this same belief; for if it is the work of Jesus to melt hearts by His patient endurance, and so to win them to penitence followed by pardon, here, as much as in any other theory, only in a more roundabout way, the agony of the Holy One has taken the place of the chastisement of the unholy. It may be difficult to admit an idea of Substitution; but perhaps it is more difficult to exclude it. No one ought to be smiled at for proclaiming that Christ died in the sinner's stead; every preacher ought to boast of it.

As we are all very well aware, illustrations from legal or social experience always fail, since they present the matter in an external guise, which leaves faith out of account, whereas, in the moment of trust in Christ, the man is transformed. Still, crude illustrations are the only ones available, and they are not to be contemned. It is irrelevant to argue that punishment of the innocent for the guilty is not permitted in law courts, and to adduce some legal decision against it. What does it matter to us whether Oliver Cromwell, or any other potentate, refused to let a criminal's penalty be borne by a friend? Who could expect that public law would provide for such a rare contingency? "Scarcely for a righteous man will one die". As a matter of fact, Substitution has

been allowed in other societies, as when, in China, a magistrate accepted a man's offer to die on behalf of his criminal nephew. Everyone must admire such an offer: and all who read of the famous lover of God and of men, Vincent de Paul, taking the place of a convict in the French galleys, must wish to believe the anecdote true. We are not such hard individualists as we sometimes take ourselves to be. In our daily practice we allow worthy citizens to pay heavy fines on behalf of criminals who would otherwise be thrust into prison. And when there comes to light some instance of man or woman submitting to what is perhaps the most dreadful species of punishment, unjust suspicion or reproach, in order to shield a friend, it is not in our heart to condemn, but only to reverence.

It is sometimes urged, even by writers of distinction, that while one may suffer for another, no one may be punished in another's stead. It is true that no innocent person can have quite the experience of a guilty one; he cannot have a bad conscience, or know himself guilty, though, in his sympathy and shame, he may feel guilty. But, in the ordinary sense of words, the innocent may be punished; and really in preaching we may and must use ordinary and intelligible language. We are obliged to agree with Dods who asks, "In what intelligible sense can sins be borne but by bearing their punishment?"¹

¹ On Hebrews ix. 28, in the *Expositor's Greek Testament*. Denney, in his posthumous work on *The Christian Doctrine of*

Illustrations fall short, partly because they are external, partly because no human substitute is really innocent: no one dare say, I have suffered more than I myself have deserved. Arguments of this kind, however, are not modern, but very well worn. The real difficulty of to-day is of another kind. The modern man judges that his forefathers made a false estimate of God's character when they regarded Justice as primary, Love as secondary: he rejects the doctrine that God *may* exercise mercy, but *must* exercise justice. He denies that wickedness must be punished and, still more, that a victim, innocent or guilty, must be found. Taking up the clue long ago furnished by Jonathan Edwards, the modern theologian maintains that an adequate repentance is sufficient atonement. Jonathan Edwards was convinced that this way of atonement was barred, because no sinner could offer adequate repentance. In the nineteenth century McLeod Campbell and his successors propounded the theory that Christ had offered on man's behalf an adequate penitence, or, rather (since we cannot speak of Christ's penitence), that Christ, in His life and death, had offered the equivalent of penitence, for He rendered a perfect assent to God's condemnation of sin. The modern, however, is not much enamoured of vicarious

Reconciliation, is strongly attracted to McLeod Campbell's view, but not satisfied with it. On p. 262 he denies that Christ's sufferings are penal, but on p. 273 he explains in what sense they are so. Cf. J. K. Mozley: *The Doctrine of Atonement*, p. 216.

penitence, or anything of the kind. He is persuaded that the sinner's own penitence, adequate, or inadequate, is enough for the purpose: this is the prevalent doctrine. And not seldom it is taught that whether a sinner repents or not makes no difference to God, who is unchanging love.

Everyone must feel that there was something harsh and ungodly in the old exaltation of Justice. It does not follow that justice may simply be swept away, or treated as one of the forms of love. These simplifications, tempting as they are, are only a will-o'-the-wisp. Love and justice are not opposed to one another, and they often coincide; but it is beyond the reach of finite intelligence to make them identical. On this subject there has been, in not a few minds, a "rake's progress". (1) Thinkers began by asserting that Punishment was not merely Retribution. True enough. (2) They advanced to the assertion that Punishment was primarily Discipline (for the improvement of the culprit); and, if this failed, it became Vengeance, or Retribution.¹ This is false; for punishment must first of all be *just*: if it be not just, suffering inflicted for the sinner's benefit, but without his consent, is a wrong done to him. If it be just, it is deserved, which means that it is Retribution. (3) The next step was to deny that suffering inflicted on the guilty was Retribution at all; it was

¹ See R. C. Moberly: *Atonement and Personality*, p. 14. The spirit of Moberly is devout; but at several momentous points there is grave incoherence in his thought.

solely for his good. (4) Last of all, it was denied that "wickedness ought somehow to be balanced by pain". Well may Dr. R. Mackintosh characterize this tenet as a "poisonous moral heresy".²

When this stage is reached, it is easy to deny that God is a Judge, and to assert that He is love and nothing but love. Our generation delights in juvenile escapades of thought, and is never better pleased than when she flouts the advice and experience of history. There is a certain charm in the *naïveté* of opinions so irresponsibly uttered, as if for the first time. But they cannot be taken very seriously. It would be nothing except loss to men, if God did not judge. For then the soul would make appeal from the dead God without to the Living God within: the soul, which is ever judging itself, would be forever lonely in the presence of the God who judges not.

In other words, this New God of theology is not a real Being: His nature is more limited than ours. And the same is to be said of a God who is Love and only love. He is an abstraction. We might as well talk of a God who is Light and nothing but light; and this reminds us of the abstract God of Aristotle. In fact, the God who is imagined in much of our modern literature is not the God of either Old or New Testament; and just as little is He the God of reason, or of experience. Like the dull, passionless Deity of old Greek theology, He is a God so remote

¹ R. Mackintosh: *Christianity and Sin*, p. 214.

from human nature that no one could rejoice to approach Him.

No one could wish to be like this God. For no human being desires to become love and nothing but love. When men of healthy natures are the witnesses of injustice, cruelty, or base misconduct, they burst out in wrath against the wrongdoer; and this wrath is not mingled with love, nor is it a form of love. Love and pity may be felt for the oppressed. For the oppressor, also, when anger has found utterance, there may be sorrow; yes, and love too, as the onlookers consider what a misshapen person he is. In the anger itself there is no trace of desire to do the miscreant good; yet our conscience never applauds us more than when a tide of generous indignation has swept our souls.

If, then, we exclude judgment and wrath from the nature of God, we do not bring Him near, but put Him far away: the Living God is no more. The wrath of God is not something to be denied or apologized for, or cloaked in euphemisms like "reaction"¹: How any soul can contemplate meeting with the Holy and loving Father without self-questioning and awe, I do not understand. We may argue that the thoroughly penitent soul stands in dread of no punishment, and needs no one to endure punishment on his behalf. But this is an

¹ It is surprising that Principal Denney, the soul of sincerity, made use of the word "reaction" in his lectures on *The Christian Doctrine of Reconciliation*.

imaginary case. What God sees is an impenitent world. And what has actually happened is that when the Holy One appeared the world, unable to bear the reproach of His goodness, cleared itself by calling His goodness evil, accounted Him the chief of sinners, and treated Him as worse than the worst of men. Jesus, in obedience to the Father's will, offered Himself to the misjudgment and malignity of His fellows, and neither asked nor received twelve legions of angels for His deliverance. This is a fact that shocks, or ought to shock, our moral sense. It cannot be softened by the assertion that suffering is in the constitution of things. That He who went about doing good was regarded as a criminal and treated as a criminal is the appalling fact. As may be seen from attempts to argue that God had nothing to do with it, the difficulty lies in the bare fact, much more than in the interpretation of it. The mystery may not be aggravated, it may be much abated, if we recognize that by His own will, and by the Father's appointment, the Innocent did, in some sense, take the place of the guilty. This, as we have seen, was the teaching of Jesus Himself.

No theory can ever satisfy us. But if we are able to accept our Lord's gift of Himself in the Supper, we remain loyal to His spirit. We may be persuaded that the Moral Influence theory best expresses the truth; this need not hinder our acceptance of Himself, or, if we prefer it, of God, *through Him*, as our Saviour. If we are persuaded that such a theory

as that of McLeod Campbell is more satisfactory, we receive Christ to dwell in our hearts, and thus come before God. In Christ we make the complete assent to God's condemnation of sin. He in us, by His life, death, and resurrection, renders to God the perfect offering.

Dogmas are roughly handled nowadays. Let them be roughly handled; but may God forbid that for us Jesus should cease to be a Saviour! There are ways of regarding Him which make it unnecessary to commit ourselves to Him for time and eternity, or to accept His gift. It fits the sceptical frame of our generation to leave a backdoor open so that all may be well even if it should turn out that Jesus was not supernatural, or holy. And there may be stages in the development of our thought when some degree of scepticism is inevitable and right. But we cannot spend a lifetime in doubt. Trust in Jesus, and in Him alone, is just as hard, and just as essential, for students and critics, as it is for thoughtless wrestlers with sin. Apart from this, there is no vital Christianity.

THE COMMEMORATION OF CHRIST'S DEATH

WE have already observed that if we accept the shorter version of Luke's account of the Lord's Supper as representing the true text of his Gospel, we are then left with a narrative which omits the command to perpetuate the rite, and Paul becomes

our sole authority for this command. Paul has been charged with inaccuracy in his version of the saying about the cup and the covenant, and with introducing his peculiar theology ("new covenant") into the saying. This charge falls to the ground, as there is nothing specifically Pauline in the words which he ascribes to Jesus. There is thus no reason for suspecting his accuracy in reporting the words, "Do this in remembrance of me". But why did Mark omit these words? It is to be observed that he has a habit of abbreviating Christ's sayings; and critics have suggested that after the observance of the Lord's Supper had been firmly established he counted it needless to mention the injunction to repeat it; or else he was content to give the words actually quoted by the person who presided at the Lord's Table. Not so Paul, who found it very necessary to protest in the most solemn manner that the Corinthian supper, so carelessly managed, was in flagrant disharmony with Christ's commands.

We are not at the end of our perplexities. In the Acts of the Apostles we read of a festive breaking of bread in which death seems forgotten. "Day by day", we are informed, the believers "continuing steadfastly with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread at home, did take their food with gladness and singleness of heart, praising God" (Acts ii. 46). Besides this, scholars have called attention to the curious account given in the ancient handbook known as the *Didache*, where the thanks

for the bread and the wine remind readers of prayers offered at Jewish meals, and make but a meagre reference to Jesus, and none at all to His death. From this it has been inferred that in the primitive Church there was no remembrance of Christ's death, but only a feast of fellowship; and that it was Paul, or perhaps the Gentile church of Antioch, that instituted the Lord's Supper, as we know it.

In regard to the description in the Book of Acts, it is to be observed that gladness was the right frame of mind for those who were assured that the Lord had risen, and knew that He had given Himself to them and was now living in them.¹ Triumph was the note of the Church, as we see in all the Epistles. A more commonplace remark must be added. The Lord's Supper was in those days a meal; even if solemn thoughts were considered appropriate while believers reminded themselves of the Cross, such thoughts could not pervade the dinner, or the supper, from beginning to end.

We are now able to judge the prayers of the *Didache*. On the night when He was betrayed our Saviour took bread and gave thanks. Did He give thanks for His own sacrifice? This is very unlikely. No doubt He praised God for the bread and for the wine somewhat after the accustomed fashion of Jews at mealtime. After the Resurrection, as we may readily suppose, His followers simply continued this practice. Presumably the Christians at Corinth did

¹ Cf. E. F. Scott: *The Beginnings of the Church*, p. 201.

likewise: for Paul, during his stay in the city, had taught them the meaning of the feast (1 Cor. xi. 23); but if he had prescribed appropriate prayers, and had enjoined them to recite the Lord's words, such as "This is my body", they could scarcely have fallen into the error of holding a disorderly supper which was not a Lord's Supper at all. If we reflect on these things, we cease to feel any surprise that in the sacramental prayers of the *Didache* there is little allusion to Jesus, and none to His death.

It ought to be observed that even if we supposed the Jewish Christians to have begun by treating their common meal as a mere feast of fellowship, it would by no means follow that Paul, or the Antioch Christians before him, introduced a novelty in transforming the feast into a commemoration of Christ's death. They simply reverted to the Supper as it was held on the night when He was betrayed. How could they do anything else with Peter at hand (Gal. i. 18—ii. 13) to check innovations? It is gross straining of the evidence to assert that the Apostle developed the doctrine of the Communion Feast. As we have seen, the two sayings, "This is my body", "This is my blood", must have come from our Lord Himself. There is doctrine enough here without any addition!¹

¹ Heitmüller, to whom we owe much, attempts to draw a contrast between the teaching of Jesus and Paul on the Supper; but he is too honest to conceal the fact that the contrast cannot be established, as any one may see by examining his little book *Taufe und Abendmahl im Urchristentum*.

CHAPTER IV

APOSTOLIC INTERPRETATION

IN our time a host of writers have asserted that, from the beginning, the Church misconstrued the purpose of Jesus. The contrast between the first three Gospels and the rest of the New Testament is indeed very great. This remark applies to all parts of the New Testament; but it is sufficient for our aim to confine attention to the Epistles of Paul and of John and to the First Epistle of Peter. If the dissimilarity of Gospels and Epistles were more fully recognized, there would be less inclination to regard the Gospels as first-rate authorities for the time of the Apostolic and Sub-apostolic Church, and second-rate authorities for the time of Christ. When we have discussed this contrast, we may find ourselves at a loss to understand how the Evangelists resisted the temptation to contaminate their record, so to speak, with Church language regarding belief, faith, regeneration, and the light, love, power, peace, and joy which the Holy Spirit imparts.

I wonder how many students have felt it on the tip of their tongue to exclaim that to move from the Old Testament to the Gospels was only a step, but to move from Gospels to Epistles was a leap. Circumstances, it need hardly be said, afford partial explanation of the chasm in the New Testament. The Epistles were addressed to converts, and

predominantly to Gentile converts. In the Gospels the scene often lies outside God's Kingdom; and sometimes it is very much outside. Jesus moves among a people who listen admiringly, but not, as a rule, receptively. They welcome the Prophet as a healer of their ailments; and now and then they display faith of a peculiarly interesting character, which rejoices His heart. Yet deeper religious elements are absent from the bustling scene. Did any of the sick, or their kinsfolk, become followers of Christ? Mary of Magdala is mentioned, and there may have been others. The Gadarene demoniac would fain have joined the band of disciples. Presumably the cured paralytic was among the adherents.

It is when the Master is dealing with disciples, or would-be disciples, that a comparison with the Epistles becomes more possible. In the Epistles we breathe an air of peace and joy, of present victory and boundless hope. There is a strong assurance of God's favour, and an overwhelming sense of the greatness of salvation. Abundant and delightful examples will occur to everyone. "Behold", exclaims John, "what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us that we should be called children of God: and such we are" (1 John iii. 1). The First Epistle of Peter speaks of "joy unspeakable and full of glory" in the experience of those who believe, and of their love for the unseen Lord (i. 8). The Epistle to the Ephesians struggles to express the happiness of those who have already received the

earnest of future bliss, the exceeding greatness of God's power to those who believe, and the exceeding riches of His grace (i. 13f., 18f.; ii. 7). Paul's exultation at the faith, love, and knowledge of his converts is so frequent and abundant as to need no quotation. He indicates strong confidence in them; and this confidence is far more than a mere generous hope. The writers and readers of the New Testament have received the earnest of the Spirit; they have been sealed with the Spirit; He bears witness with their spirit that they are God's children.¹

It would be too much to say, with some New Testament students, that Paul hoped for the ultimate salvation of all his converts; yet we must agree that confidence predominates, and that misgiving is in the background. The Corinthians are urged to examine themselves, rather than the Apostle, and prove whether they are in the faith (2 Cor. xiii. 5); but there is little in the Epistles to remind us of any striving to enter, or of any difficult choice to be made. Salvation is sure: what the converts must see to is that their behaviour may correspond to the greatness of their happiness; and that they may not through slackness miss the prize.

In the Gospels we learn the immense difficulty of finding the way, and pressing through the gate that leads to life; the solemn duty of pondering this difficulty, and of overcoming it at all cost; the fearful consequences of failure; the possibility that even the

¹ 2 Cor. i. 22; Eph. i. 13-14; Rom. viii. 16; cf. 1 John ii. 20.

chosen may not succeed. Our Lord seems bent on making men see what loss of property and of friendship, what homelessness and insecurity, what suffering, what risk to life, must be the lot of those who choose the better part. We are surprised and disconcerted when we compare His method with that which we often adopt, as we bid the hesitant make faith's venture, assured that hindrances will then vanish of their own accord.

It is difficult to read the Gospels with open eyes; but when we make the attempt we can scarcely fail to take from them an impression of severity such as we seldom feel in our study of the Epistles. Jesus does, indeed, portray Himself as one who takes a hearty share in the pleasures of life; and He depicts the gaiety of His companions as that of a wedding-party. There must have been something in His presence and in His speech that tended to make men joyous. We are reminded of His invitation, Come, and I will give you rest, and of His Beatitudes, though in Luke's form there is something almost grim, or pathetic, in their smile. We remember, too, how frequently He compares the future joy of God's Kingdom to that of a Banquet. Several parables tell of lavish rewards for trifling service; one parable likens the Kingdom to a treasure; another likens it to a pearl, for the sake of which a man sells all. And the wealth of those who become Christ's followers is exhibited in a lively fashion once and again. Yet this wealth is of an odd kind; it belongs to those

who have lost all. And the highest joy is the ecstasy of those who are maltreated for Jesus' sake. We begin to understand how He could announce that He came to cast fire and sword on the earth.

Can we account for the austere note of the Gospels by the harassed condition of the Church at the date of their composition? No, for the grave tone is very pervasive, and sounds in the most characteristic speech of our Saviour. Or, on the other hand, can we explain the unearthly buoyancy of the Apostolic age, and of many a succeeding age, by the gift of Pentecost? Yes, perhaps we can, in some degree: yet our perplexity is not dispelled. Are we to conjecture that even Apostles were sometimes carried away by the short-lived enthusiasm of nominal converts; and that the judgment of Jesus, "Many are called, but few chosen", more nearly accords with the verdict of history? It may be so: yet I half-wonder whether the glorious future of His own people was hid even from the Son. For experience has vindicated the triumphant song of the saints; and the gifts of the Ascended Lord to all generations of His Church have excelled His promises.

We must now recur to the paradoxical fact that while, on the one hand, Jesus makes immense demands, and requires of His friends that they shall outvie the Pharisees in fulfilling the Ten Commandments; on the other hand, He exposes Himself to the censure of the Pharisees by consorting with men and women who break all the commandments.

About half a dozen instances are given of His friendliness to those bad people, of His lodging and dining with them, His teaching them, and His exquisite defence of His attitude to them. Strange it is that no record of this teaching has been preserved!

Writers upon Gospel themes often appear to assume that the sinners with whom our Lord had to do were penitents, or that a smile from Him, or an assurance of God's love, could move them to tears. But the loving-kindness of the Saviour is seen in the fact that He had to deal with hard, greedy, dishonourable men, and with those who delighted in unclean things: all experience teaches us also that many of them must have justified themselves, and thanked God that they were no hypocrites. How were they changed? We vainly seek to know what it was that touched the heart of the woman before she stepped into Simon's house. Was it a call to repentance, and how was this expressed? Or was it an announcement of grace, or both combined? What was the character of any such announcement? The fifteenth chapter of Luke is not an address to sinners, and, in fact, the parables of the Lost Sheep and Lost Coin are not exactly fitted for that purpose. All three parables are in their place as a reply to Pharisees and a defence of Christ's conduct, and the last parable, in its entreaty to the Elder Brother, is a moving appeal to them. Yet we may infer that Jesus sometimes spoke in a similar fashion when He made direct appeal to the ungodly. How can we

determine whether He proclaimed God's readiness to pardon, or His own readiness to welcome, as expressed in words like "Come unto Me, and I will give you rest"? Since He Himself declared the forgiveness of sins, and since He described Himself, not God, as Physician, Seeker, Saviour, and Friend of Sinners, it is not unlikely that sometimes, at least, He spoke in His own name. If He did, there would be, at this point, a correspondence between Gospels and Epistles. Conjecture is idle; yet we are compelled to draw attention to this most alluring theme.

So far as our fragmentary records indicate, Jesus among sinners is full of grace; for disciples, or would-be disciples, He has a "kind but searching glance", as if He would ask, "Lovest thou Me?" Yet the difference may be partly due to the brevity of the Gospels. Some of the Twelve, for all that we know, may once have been great sinners, as the Epistle of Barnabas asserts;¹ there may have been a preliminary stage in their experience, of which we are not informed. And, on the other hand, for the worldlings who met our Lord in Matthew's home, as well as for god-fearing people, the time must have come, sooner or later, when a stern decision had to be made. Were many rich profligates persuaded to leave all for Jesus' sake?

Upon the whole, Law and Grace appear to lie side by side in the Gospels, unreconciled. Are we not

¹ *Epistle of Barnabas*, ch. v.

justified in taking the Epistles as a worthy interpretation and reconciliation? It is quite probable that in the Gospels themselves, had they only been less fragmentary, we might have found some hint of a solution.

We have already seen that Gospels and Epistles are wholly at one in making eternal life depend on attachment to Jesus: criticism becomes caprice when it attempts to deny this. And it is not quite correct to deny that Justification by Faith is taught by Jesus. Treatises on Jesus and Paul have pointed out that our Lord makes humility the condition of entrance to the Kingdom; that He excludes all human merit and indicates the "justification" of the contrite Publican; that He shows how generous rewards are bestowed out of proportion to the service rendered, and even, as in the parable of the Hired Labourers, with complete disregard of its amount; and, finally, that He speaks of the Kingdom of God as a gift to the disciples. Professor Bruce comes closer to the point in his comment on Christ's saying, "He that receiveth a prophet because he is a prophet shall receive a prophet's reward; and he that receiveth a righteous man because he is a righteous man shall receive a righteous man's reward." Bruce remarks, "There is a great principle underlying, essentially the same as that involved in St. Paul's doctrine of justification by faith. The man who has goodness enough to reverence the ideal of goodness approximately or perfectly realized in another, though not in himself,

shall, in the moral order of the world, be counted a good man.”¹ There is one saying of Christ’s that comes closer still to the point: “Every one”, He promises, “who shall confess Me before men, him will I confess before my Father in Heaven.” What is this but Justification by Faith? It is echoed in Paul’s famous sentence, “If thou shalt confess . . . Jesus as Lord . . . thou shalt be saved” (Rom. x. 9).

But while Jesus, quite as emphatically as those who come after Him, makes loyalty to Himself the one thing needful, He does not plainly indicate that by union with Himself comes power to lead a holy life. We may deduce this lesson from His bestowal of forgiveness, or from His gift of Himself in the Last Supper. Yet the lesson is so little obvious that some critics have inferred the sufficiency of man’s moral powers for every task. An ordinary mind, they hold, may comprehend everything in the doctrine of Jesus, and a resolute will may carry it into practice: there is nothing beyond the reach of “the natural man”.

The suggestion of a mysterious spiritual power is not wholly absent from the first three Gospels. On one occasion Jesus answers the disciples’ question with the words, “Unto you is given the mystery of the Kingdom of God” (Mark iv. 11). On another occasion He exclaims, “I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that Thou didst hide these things from the wise and understanding, and

¹ On Matt. x. 41, in *The Expositor’s Greek Testament*,

didst reveal them unto babes" (Matt. xi. 25-27 and Luke x. 21-22). Matthew tells that when Peter confessed his faith Jesus exclaimed, "Blessed art thou . . . ; for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father" (Matt. xvi. 17). We may mention also the saying, "Many are called, but few chosen" (Matt. xxii. 14); and again, "All men cannot receive the saying, but they to whom it is given" (Matt. xix. 11).

Such sayings are few, and critics have laboured to deprive us of some of them; there is nothing mysterious, they assert, in all our Lord's discourse. In the Epistles, on the other hand, there is never the least doubt that union with Christ means power, and that Divine salvation is a secret. Paul, Peter, and John, widely as they differ in their modes of thought and expression, are all agreed upon this, and they assume that their fellow-Christians hold with them. The Gospel, as they teach, deals with things which "angels desire to look into", and it is preached "in the Holy Spirit sent down from heaven". It deals with things which the natural man does not accept, and cannot know, "a mystery hid from ages and generations". But Christians have an anointing from the Holy One which teaches them all things; they receive a spirit that is not of the world, but of God, so as to attain knowledge of the things freely given by God.¹

¹ 1 Peter i. 12; 1 Cor. ii. 14; Col. i. 26; 1 John ii. 20, 27; 1 Cor. ii. 12.

All is of God. Peter speaks of the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has begotten us again unto a living hope, and of those who are "born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible". John tells of the victorious life of such as are born of God. In the genuine epistles of Paul there is no mention of a new birth; yet he comes close to the subject when in several places he writes of adoption, and closer still in the sentence, "As then he that was born after the flesh persecuted him that was born after the Spirit, even so is it now." Far more significant is the fact that, by the use of quite different language, Paul shows how thoroughly he is in harmony with Peter, John, and Early Christians in general.¹

Paul is convinced that the preaching of the Cross is foolishness to the perishing. The Gospel is veiled in them that are perishing, because the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelieving. Moreover, there is an estrangement of will; "The carnal heart is enmity against God". But those who receive the Spirit of God have understanding of the things of God; to them the message of the Cross is no longer folly; it is power and wisdom. They have

¹ See 1 Peter i. 3, 23; 1 John iii. 9; v. 4, etc.; Gal. iv. 29. The last passage is noted by W. Reinhard (*Das Wirken des Heiligen Geistes im Menschen nach den Briefen des Apostels Paulus*). For our present purpose the authorship of First Peter and of John's Epistles is not an important question. Clearly, the doctrine of Peter and John is not derived from Paul in any slavish fashion; it is thoroughly their own.

the spirit of children, and cannot restrain their tongue from exclaiming "Father!" They have put off the old man and have put on the new. They have put on Christ. And the result is unheard of achievement in life and conduct. They "have crucified the flesh with the passions and the lusts thereof"; the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, and every grace. As John puts it, those that have been born of God cannot sin.¹

A mysterious light has come into the world, as if, a second time, God had said, "Let there be light". Christians are called out of darkness into His marvellous light. "The darkness is past and the true light now shineth". And a mysterious power has entered the world. Wherever it works, life comes: "If any man is in Christ, there is a new creation".²

All this, or most of it, it is now alleged, is alien to the simple religion of Jesus: the Christianity of the Church, almost from the beginning, has been dominated by Pagan notions of mysterious revelation and re-birth. Common sense may feel impatient of such assertions; yet they are not to be treated as if they were simply ridiculous. The coincidence of Christian and Pagan thought at the opening of the new era startles us; at the very least we must own that the religious terms, and, in a measure, the

¹ 1 Cor. i. 18; 2 Cor. iv. 3-4; Rom. viii. 7-8; 1 Cor. ii. 10-14; i. 24; Rom. viii. 15; Col. iii. 9-10; Eph. iv. 22-24; Gal. iii. 27; v. 22-24; 1 John iii. 9; v. 18.

² 2 Cor. iv. 6; 1 Peter ii. 9; 1 John v. 20; ii. 8; Col. i. 11 and Eph. i. 19 and 1 John v. 4, etc.; 2 Cor. v. 17.

religious notions of the Heathen world lay ready to be utilized by the infant Church. One of the most amazing examples is the prevalence of terms expressing re-birth in all the Mystery Religions. To be sure, the evidence for moral and spiritual change in association with the Mysteries is meagre and debatable; the notions of physical rejuvenation, and of a happy immortality, were the most prominent. But whatever may be said as to the spiritual worth of the Pagan idea, we are almost shut up to the conclusion that New Testament writers, and the Early Church in general, borrowed their expressions concerning the new birth from the Heathen world.¹

Again, it is a well-known fact that in the Mystery Religions of many lands the ever-recurring theme was that of a god who died and came to life again. This god seems to have been originally a deity of vegetation: plants and trees wither in Autumn and revive in Spring. Or else he was a sun-god, and his death corresponded to the failing of the sun in mid-winter. Those who took part in the Mysteries, it is believed, were spectators of a drama in which the death and resurrection of the god were displayed. And there is considerable reason for surmising that the devotees of such worship imagined themselves to

¹ How strong the evidence is may be seen from the fact that the Roman Catholic writer, W. Reinhard, allows that Paul in this matter may have made use of Pagan conceptions. See *Das Wirken des Heiligen Geistes im Menschen nach den Briefen des Apostels Paulus*, p. 44 n. And cf. H. A. A. Kennedy: *St. Paul and the Mystery Religions*, p. 69.

be dying and arising to newness of life through their sympathetic contemplation of the tragedy.

When we hear such things, our mind is at once carried away to the teaching of Paul in regard to dying with Christ and rising to walk in newness of life; and in regard to his own desire to be conformed to Christ's death in hope of attaining to a share in the resurrection. Could the Apostle have expressed himself in this fashion, unless Mystery Religion had put it into his head? And would he have neglected what seems the obvious signification of baptism, namely cleansing, in order to describe it as a burial ("baptized unto His death"; "buried with Him in baptism"), unless Mystery Religion had led the way by immersing the aspirants some time before they were admitted to contemplate the drama of the god?¹

We cannot isolate Paul: the question is broad and grave, it affects Apostolic Christianity at large. Do we not feel that the mysterious contrasts between Darkness and Light, Death and Life, Corruptible Seed and Incorruptible, the Natural Man and the Spiritual Man are far removed from the morally profound but intellectually simple instruction which pervades the first three Gospels? It is true that, as several writers have pointed out, there is a wonderful moral harmony between Gospels and Epistles, and that their thoughts of God are akin. But what avails

¹ See Rom. vi. 1-11; Phil. iii. 10-11; Gal. ii. 20; Rom. vi. 3; Col. ii. 12.

this if the results have been obtained by alien means, if doctrines of regeneration, trust in Jesus as Saviour, union with Him, and enlightenment by the Spirit, are not a genuine element in Christianity as He taught it, or even a correct interpretation of His mind? This is the insinuation frequently made at the present time.

Are we forgetting that Jesus, like Paul, Peter, John, and all their companions, made man's welfare, for time and eternity, to depend on union with Himself?¹ Are we forgetting that, on the night when He was betrayed, He bestowed Himself upon the Twelve? When He said, "This is my body", He went much further than when He promised to be in the midst of two or three as they gathered in His name. Jesus, henceforth, was not merely beside His followers, pleading for them with the Father, as they used His name; He was within them, as separate individuals. Day by day, or week by week, as each believer received the bread, he said to himself, Christ gives Himself to me; He is in me. The saint was not imagining some Heavenly Man; nor was he imagining, as a Gentile convert might conceivably have done, some new divinity, resembling Pagan gods. It was the historical Jesus whom he meant, as he exclaimed, Christ lives in me. He could not mean any other. How firmly this conviction lodged in the mind of the Church, we learn from her

¹ The value of comparisons between Jesus and Paul is much impaired when this, the chief point of resemblance, is ignored.

literature. The instance that occurs most readily is that of the martyr Felicitas at Carthage, comforted by the assurance that when she entered the arena Jesus would suffer in her.

It will now be evident, I hope, that such expressions as "Christ liveth in me", are not to be explained by declaring that Paul, their author, was a mystic. If this be mysticism, all Christians, Jew or Gentile, were, and must ever be, mystics, because Jesus has taught them so to be.

Thus, at a most unlikely point, we recognize direct continuity between Gospels and Epistles. To believers who habitually thought of Christ as dwelling in them, some religious ideas that would otherwise have appeared far-fetched, were natural enough. The conception of Christ as living, dying, and rising again in the Christian may have seemed a matter of course. Paul writes as if it were so, or as if it had but to be presented in order to be accepted. He may have been only expressing, or expanding, what he had often heard on the lips of others.

We may possibly go a step further. Earlier in the present chapter it has been observed that the interpretation of Baptism as a burial seems remote from its primary meaning; and the idea of being buried with Christ through Baptism into death reminds a reader far more of the Mystery Religions than of anything in the Gospels. But we must remember that Christian baptism did not begin until Jesus had died and risen again; for Jesus Himself did not baptize, and

if His disciples ever did so, they must soon have given up the practice. It is often conjectured that when Christians adopted the Rite they copied the followers of John the Baptist. It is, however, very unlikely (psychologically improbable) that the jubilant followers of a Risen Lord should have copied a dying sect. And, what is more, their ritual was not a copy of John's. His was "a baptism of repentance"; theirs was a baptism "into the name of the Lord Jesus" (Acts xix. 1-7). It has been observed that, apart from a passage in Ephesians (v. 26), the Apostle Paul speaks only once of cleansing from sin in relation to this ceremony.¹ In the Acts of the Apostles repentance is occasionally mentioned in a similar connexion; but it is often omitted. This is just what might have been expected; for the character of baptism was altered when it was "in the name", or "into the name". It now spoke, perhaps, less of sins forsaken than of attachment to the Saviour, and incorporation into Him.

We may vainly guess how it came about that a baptism, *new in kind*, took rise in the Church of Christ.² As to its date of origin, the Acts of the

¹ Heitmüller: *Im Namen Christi*, p. 321. The exception is 1 Cor. vi. 11.

² The reader may think of Matt. xxviii. 19; but this text, as it stands, is in disagreement with the actual practice of the primitive Church; for the New Testament speaks of baptism in the name of Christ, not of the Trinity. And such a passage as Acts i. 5 seems even to contrast the followers of John, who received water-baptism, with the followers of Jesus, who

Apostles suggests the day of Pentecost. If this be so, it was a baptism into One who had died but a short time since. And, before the day was done, the new converts were doubtless partaking of the bread and wine which spoke to them of the Lord's death. Yet more, the death of Jesus had already been called a baptism, twice at least, and this by the Lord Himself. We are prone to repeat the phrase without any exclamation of surprise; for Him it must have had special meaning, and the meaning was certainly not that of cleansing. Even His first immersion by John was a baptism into death; since at that ceremony it was announced that He was the Suffering Servant of the Lord. When He named the coming agony a baptism, did the word mean for Him that the real immersion was to take place as He went down into the grave, numbered with the transgressors, bearing the sin of many, and leaving it there? However little we may be accustomed to reflect upon Christ's words regarding His own baptism (Mark x. 38-39; Luke xii. 50), the disciples must have mused upon them, more especially as He intimated that none could sit beside Him in glory who was unable to share His baptism and His cup. Martyrs proved their familiarity with the thought when they coveted the baptism of blood, until the very Heathen

were to receive a very different kind of baptism. In view of this, it is perhaps a little difficult to be sure that Christian baptism originated on the very day of Pentecost.

echoed their cry, "Washed and saved! Washed and saved!"

We see that in several ways baptism was associated with the death of Christ. It could scarcely fail to occur to some of those who were baptized "in the name", or "into the name", of Jesus Christ, or simply "into Christ", as Paul puts it, that they had a share in the baptism of suffering which the Lord had undergone, that in fact, they were baptized into His death. We are not now so sure as we were a little while ago that Paul's exposition of this subject was pervaded by the notions of Mystery Religion. Besides this, it is a difficult thing to understand how the strict Pharisee, even although he was a native of Asia Minor, could make, directly or indirectly, heavy borrowings from Paganism, and then thrust them upon an unknown church at Rome (Rom. vi. 1-14), where Jewish Christians were numerous. And he himself expected shortly to visit this church! It was another matter if he was merely expanding, or expounding, ideas in which all Christians were at home.¹

A believer who habitually said to himself, "Christ liveth in me", might spontaneously pass to the converse expression, "I am in Christ." We see, as a matter of fact, that in the Epistles of John there is a frequent oscillation between the conception of

¹ Some readers may prefer to think of Paul as turning to account the best in Paganism. Some may spurn the suggestion. But here we are considering what is probable or improbable.

“abiding in Him”, and that of having Christ’s truth, words, anointing, or Himself, abiding in the soul. There is, moreover, a very instructive passage in Colossians (i. 27–29) which shows that for Paul, the believer in Christ, and Christ in the believer, were the same thing. Yet the expression, “in Christ”, which occurs both in Paul and in Peter (not to mention “in God” in 1 Thess. i. 1 and 2 Thess. i. 1), is far more frequent than those which speak of Christ in you, or Christ in me, far more frequent, also, than “in the Spirit”; and this suggests an independent origin. All agree that it was not a Pagan origin: and it may have its roots in the Greek version of the Old Testament.

Our Lord certainly gives warrant for the belief that He Himself dwells in the heart of His people. But so far as the first three Gospels inform us, He does little more than hint at any blindness or incapacity in the natural man, or, in other words, any need for the enlightening and transforming power of the Holy Spirit. The teaching of Jesus in this respect seems more akin to that of the Old Testament than to that of the infant Church. Yet Jews who reject the doctrine of Regeneration are virtually repudiating their own prophets, in their announcements regarding the removal of the stony heart and the giving of a new heart and spirit by God Himself.¹ And Jesus hints at the need for radical

¹ Montefiore, whom we all love, seems to be aware of this at times, when he confesses the need for the grace of God.

change in the words, "Either make the tree good, and its fruit good; or make the tree corrupt, and its fruit corrupt" (Matt. xii. 33). He does not intimate that the Twelve must be born again when He informs them that unless they become as little children they shall not enter God's Kingdom. Yet how, if they are not already humble, can they make themselves so? How, in the admirable paraphrase of Loisy, can they become, "in spirit and in feeling, what children are in reality and status, little ones"?¹ It takes but slight knowledge of human nature to discover that this is just what cannot be done. Jesus does not use the *word* "regeneration" when He declares that it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the Kingdom of God. But He teaches the *fact* of regeneration when He adds that what is beyond human power is possible with God: He alone can make a man willing to part with all, and follow Christ.

What an individuality there is in such sayings! No one could mistake them for interpolations due to the Evangelists. And something similar may be judged regarding the well authenticated but much disputed declaration concerning things hidden from

But what a change it would make in his own comprehension of the subject, if he frankly acknowledged the awful difference between those that tread the broad road and those that are on the path which leads to life!

¹ Loisy: *Les Evangiles Synoptiques*, ii. 71 (cf. A. G. Grieve on the passage in Peake's Commentary, p. 716).

the wise and revealed to babes. It must be confessed that the utterance regarding the secret of the Kingdom of God, disclosed to followers but withheld from outsiders, is not without difficulty where Mark puts it. But it also bears the stamp of authenticity.

Matthew, Mark, and Luke are very nearly silent in regard to the work of the Spirit.¹ This is a perplexing fact. It might indeed be argued that as Jesus gave Himself to His followers there was no need, or place, for a separate gift of the Spirit. The argument scarcely meets the difficulty, since Jesus does not speak of His own work in men's hearts; indeed, we do not well see how He could have spoken appropriately of such a thing. What a place the Holy Spirit really occupied in His mind we learn from the fact that, as He probably told the Twelve, He saw the Spirit, like a dove, descending on Himself at baptism. He was aware that this Influence had come to abide in Him, revealing secrets, conferring power; and thus He was aghast when, in their spite, men asserted that His work was the Devil's doing. In the Old Testament, here and there, the Spirit of the Lord is very nearly a Person; but in our Lord's words regarding the blasphemy of the Spirit the more vivid experience of Apostolic times is anticipated. It is anticipated also

¹ Luke shows himself astonishingly faithful to the facts as he knew them; for in his first two chapters, where Christ's words are not reported, he frequently names the Spirit.

in the promise to the disciples that when they are arraigned at the bar the Holy Spirit will speak in them. This utterance has aroused suspicion because it looks like a piece of actual history put in the guise of prediction. But, as a matter of fact, it appears to rest on exceptionally good authority.¹

Apart from Luke (xxiv. 49), our first three Gospels do not explicitly foretell a Pentecostal gift. It is evident, however, both from the Book of Acts and from other writings, that in the belief of the Early Christians, Christ had prepared His followers to expect it. And, in the opinion of one critical writer at least, Paul's theology implies a share in the general belief.² Is it not more likely that Paul was right than that he simply guessed, or inferred, or picked up from hearsay, a promise made by Christ? And is it not possible that at most times our Lord was reticent in regard to the Spirit, just because, ever since the baptism, He was conscious of a dread and ineffable Presence?

Jesus did speak of the Spirit in a peculiarly impressive way. Yet the fact remains, and we can hardly affirm it too forcibly, that we feel ourselves to be in a new world as we turn from Gospels to Epistles, and read of men born of the Spirit, filled with the Spirit, having their life hid with Christ in God,

¹ See B. H. Streeter: *The Four Gospels*, p. 280. The passage seems to have occurred both in Mark and in the document known as "Q".

² Cf. E. F. Scott: *The Spirit in the New Testament*, p. 62.

being strengthened with all might according to His glorious power, guarded by the peace of God which passeth all understanding, rejoicing with joy unspeakable and full of glory. Such expressions are the outflow of an experience rich beyond compare. How can any one be so blind as to trace to some Hellenism of Antioch, or half-pagan influence of Asia Minor, the new element which appears in the Epistles and the Church, in particular, the overwhelming consciousness that the Holy Spirit is with His people? When Pagan ideas and phrases are borrowed, they are brass turned to gold as soon as Christians touch them. The phrases do not suggest the experience; the experience avails itself of them.

This experience not only was, but is, the common heritage of God's people. If it were proved that the Gospels furnished no apparent ground for her convictions, the Church must still refuse to abandon them, and neglect the Epistles. It could not be done. Wherever religion is vital, there all the great teachings of the Apostles shine. Who that knows anything of men can fail to bear witness that the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God? Regeneration, or supernatural enlightenment and renewal of the will, Salvation through faith in Christ, the Indwelling of the Spirit, such truths are as precious now as ever they were. Justification by Faith may appear foreign: the language may be foreign; the substance is not so. When I was a student, it seemed to me impossible that the errors

of Legalism, so thoroughly exposed by Paul, could still survive. By and by I found, in conversation with men, both in Christian and in Heathen lands, how much I was mistaken. Everywhere men seek, as of old, to satisfy their conscience by the performance of duty, or by telling themselves that they have done their duty, that they have never harmed any one, or that, at least, they are as good as those who make a profession of religion, and better, perhaps, for they are not hypocrites. Everywhere men find peace when they quit these "works of the law", and rest on Christ alone. Nothing so shuts men from God's Kingdom as self-justification does. In all Christian congregations there are men and women who harden their hearts against God by this means. It is vain to tell such people of the love of God, or of forgiveness. They are convinced that they have no need to repent. Nothing will touch them till they learn how insufficient is their boasted goodness. Yet boast they must. And, thanks be to God, He gives us something better to boast about. As Paul says, "We boast in Christ Jesus, and do not trust in the flesh" (Phil. iii. 3). In modern language, we do not pride ourselves upon our birth or character. This boasting in Christ is something that present-day literature says little about. Yet it answers to a great demand of the human heart; and when we are dissatisfied, not with this evil or that in our lives, but with our whole character, so that nothing in us seems good, the medicine which meets our case best

is the old saying, We boast in Christ Jesus, our Saviour. I am sure that many a congregation is ill at ease because it waits for a word like this.

The doctrine of dying with Christ and rising to walk with Him in newness of life seems to most people even more remote from their religious experience than that of Justification by Faith. And in recent times our sense of estrangement has been aggravated, as we have reached a more thorough comprehension of the Apostle's thought regarding Christ's relation to sinful flesh and to the unseen powers of evil.¹ Yet many Christians arrive at Paul's conclusion by a short-cut, when they learn with him to exclaim, "I can do all things in Him who strengtheneth me", or when they hearken to the admonition, "Count yourselves dead to sin, but alive to God, in Christ Jesus" (Rom. vi. 11). This, indeed, is the most remarkable word upon Sanctification in all the New Testament. It may be that we have still something to learn by travelling the more round-about road which the Apostle took. It may be that we shall see deeper into the meaning of the Atonement when we are more at home in the idea of dying and rising with Jesus.

We have seen that there is a deep harmony between Gospels and Epistles; yet it would be impossible to contend that, with the Gospels in his hands, a man could attain the rich revelation and spiritual life of the Apostolic Church. This life is the

¹ See C. A. Scott: *Christianity according to St. Paul*, pp. 34-36.

gift of the Holy Spirit. If the Acts of the Apostles had not furnished an account of the Day of Pentecost, we should have been obliged to conjecture that something had happened. If we reject the account as unhistorical, we must find a substitute. The Resurrection and Ascension of Jesus do not sufficiently explain the Church. It is the gift of the Ascended Lord that explains it. The Coming of the Spirit is as much a historic event as the Coming of Christ. The pouring forth of the Spirit was patent to all, and could not be hid. So we learn from Paul, from Acts, and from all the early literature.

A new thing came into the world. A new thing has been with us ever since; and how varied and incredibly great the manifestations of the Spirit have been! The manifestations varied in Apostolic times also, as we learn both from Luke and from Paul. Appropriately, in Luke's narrative of events, we read principally of what was visible, such as a gift of tongues, of prophecy, or of healing, or again, of joy, courage, power to bear witness, or to glow with love and fire. Of such things the Epistles, also, make abundant mention; and Paul descants upon the amazing and varied miracles which he himself performed, on his gift of tongues, and his revelations. But, withal, the Apostle directs attention to the fruits of the Spirit in heart and life which were apt to be slighted. It is frequently asserted that he was a pioneer in this matter; it is quite as probable that he merely enforced a lesson often taught and often

ignored. There is much more weight in the suggestion that the first converts did not regard themselves, any more than unbelieving Jews did, as having received a *new nature*; and that Paul and other Grecian Jews, under the influence of Pagan thought, introduced the idea. It may at least be conceded as a possibility that a clear knowledge of the profound change which had taken place in their hearts did not at first dawn upon the Jerusalem Christians. They may have realized it later; they may have had to wait for foreign Jews or Gentile converts to give it expression. But, to tell the truth, we have no evidence to go upon. Our Lord Himself, as we have seen, indicated the need for Divine power to change the worldly heart; and converts at Pentecost may at once have recognized that they had received this power, whether they could describe it or not. To judge by the opening chapters of the Book of Acts, neither they nor onlookers could fail to recognize it. But it is as unreasonable to expect a doctrine of regeneration, or an account of spiritual experience in Luke's narrative, as it is to expect allusions to deeds of Christ in Paul's letters.

In our time it is necessary to lay stress on the *extraordinary* fruits of the Spirit, as indicated in the words "earnest" and "seal", and in scattered allusions to something that happened when believers set out on their course. God is a living God. At present there prevails among us the old Greek

notion of the Deity as a passionless Being who never varies His method of working. This is not the God of the Bible, or of History. It is not true that His grace is ever the same, open to every one equally at all times, as a supply of water is available to those who avail themselves of it. He is often found of those who seek Him least, not merely those who hate Him, and are thus, according to the subtle analysis of modern psychology, unconsciously converted, but those who have no thought of Him at all. Moreover, there are tides of the Spirit, and no one can give a reason for their rise and fall. No one can justify the ways of God to men; none can make us understand why He touches a soul here and leaves one there unblessed, or why He floods this generation with His power, and leaves the succeeding generation dry and weak. Reasons God has; but He does not reveal them. As for our explanations, they triumph only when we deny the plain facts of life: we are like children who tear a tangle to pieces and boast that they unravel it.

After the Resurrection a gift of the Spirit was bestowed. This event is unique. It really does not amount to anything to assert that wherever there is a glimmer of truth or righteousness, or a glow of kindness, in Heathen sage or rude idolater, there God's Spirit is at work.¹ It may or may not be so,

¹ The social and self-sacrificing instincts which animals share with men would have to be taken into account before any just conclusion could be attained.

but the gift of the Spirit, which has made things new, is of a different order.

It must be added that we have no exact knowledge of the working of the Spirit in New Testament times. When, in the modern Church, men and women receive a "baptism of the Spirit", this ought not to be identified off-hand, as it frequently is, with the sudden and clearly discernible event so often indicated in Scripture. Ancient believers, to judge by the records, usually made little spiritual preparation. They received powers of which we have small experience. And often, like the Galatians, who had "received the Spirit", and "begun in the Spirit" (Gal. iii. 2-3), they failed to attain those graces which by us are deemed essential. As for modern believers, the benefits bestowed upon them are pre-eminently of the kind that we entitle "spiritual". The mode of preparation is in many cases elaborate and long sustained: its details are not taught in Scripture except by implication; and the living Spirit of God, rather than the Word, has been the Instructor. Certain it is that to our later ages "the best gifts" have often been vouchsafed.

The contrast between the Gospels and the rest of the New Testament would be almost annulled if we accepted John's Gospel as containing the very words of Jesus. There Jesus asserts, on the one hand, in the clearest tones, that He is the revelation of the Father, and that He comes to do God's will. There,

on the other hand, He asserts that no man comes to the Father but by Him; that except men eat His flesh and drink His blood they have no life in them; that whosoever believes on Him has everlasting life and does not come into Judgment; and that if disciples abide in Him, and He in them, they will bear much fruit, while apart from Him, they can do nothing. We are taught also that what is born of the flesh is flesh, and what is born of the Spirit is spirit; that except a man be born again he cannot see the Kingdom of God; that men love the darkness rather than the light; and that the world cannot receive the Spirit, because it neither sees nor knows Him. Moreover, Jesus promises that in His Name the Father will by and by send the Spirit, to dwell with the disciples and be in them; He will guide them into all truth, taking of the things of Christ, and showing them.

All this is in accord with the teaching of the Epistles and with the experience of men. Indeed, it is as if the author had sat down to ask, What do I find in the Church and miss in the Gospels? and had resolved to make room for it in his own Gospel. If, in fact, a highly intelligent stranger were to demand the essence of the New Testament in one book, we should point him to John. But when the beauty of this work lures us into accepting it as a precise report of Christ's words, we are confronted with the hard question, How came it that the first three Evangelists omitted sayings of such incom-

parable worth, and left us to infer that there was a startling contrast between Christ's words and those of His followers, when, in point of fact, there was scarcely any contrast at all? Certain it is that if we accept John when he reports, "He that hath seen Me hath seen the Father", we must accept him likewise when he reports, "No man cometh unto the Father but by Me." Theologians are prone to welcome the one saying and slight the other.

It was not of John that critics and theologians were thinking when they invited the Church to go back to the Gospels. "Back to the Gospels!" echoed the Church; little foreseeing what would follow. A false step it was from the first; for it meant that despite was done to the Spirit of Grace; it meant, in effect, that the second great event in Christian history, the Coming of the Spirit, was set aside. The step was taken with alacrity; yet anyone could have foretold that further difficulty loomed ahead. The Gospels were made the criterion; but those very books were composed by men of the Spirit; how, then, could it be certain that they contained nothing but Christ's teaching?

The Church has been hardly used. Criticism soon discovered that in the Gospels there was much to support the teaching of the Apostles, or to prepare the way for it. This discovery was unpalatable to the more sceptical, and they set themselves to purge the Gospels. They were successful; for they were not trammelled by evidence. And now in the Gospels,

if we follow such guides, we find no firm ground, but quaking bog. When the Church ventures to take any notable passage as authentic, some critic is sure to smile at her simplicity. It is almost a relief, in these pitiable circumstances, to return to the Epistles!

Back to the Epistles we must assuredly come, if we are to get true insight into the life, teaching, and death of Jesus. His sayings are often like riddles; and they are never more so than when they touch upon the themes discussed here and in the previous chapter. This is a mark of authenticity. But, as we have already observed, what is disjointed often becomes connected, and what is dark often becomes luminous, in the interpretation of the Apostles.

It is of great moment to consider that some of the unrecorded teaching of Jesus may be embedded or assimilated in the Epistles. What is actually quoted in the Gospels may not invariably have been the most influential element. Men like to repeat some of the penetrating remarks of their former instructors; yet they are quite well aware that what has made the deepest impression on their lives, and is now unconsciously reproduced in their own manner and speech, is past recall. Something similar must be in measure true of the first believers. Those who gathered in the Upper Room after the Resurrection must have assimilated a good deal that could not be set down in exact language; and this must have become the common stock of the Infant Church,

so that many "of that way" may have expressed their Lord's mind without so much as being aware of the source from which their thoughts were derived. In recent times it has been recognized that what was once taken to be Paul's peculiar theology has several of its roots in the belief of the primitive Church. And this belief, it is highly probable, may rest upon some unrecorded utterances of our Lord Himself. Besides this, we must reflect that the earliest followers of Jesus had much fuller opportunities of knowing His character than we now possess. What Peter (1 Pet. ii. 22-23) and the Epistle to the Hebrews (xii. 3) say of His patient endurance may be reminiscent not merely of the Judgment Hall, but of many an encounter with rude and hostile Galilaeans.

We cannot but feel it probable that our Evangelists have excluded some elements of deep interest. Christ's public preaching has a meagre record; His conversation with sinners is scarcely recorded at all. And, in spite of all that is told of His unwearied compassion in healing and teaching, we are brought up with a start at the declaration that the Son of Man came not to be served, but to serve. Does not this imply some deficiency in the narrative? We thought of Him as Lord; we had reason for thinking thus, as we observed what authority He exercised over friends and foes, how critics sometimes approached His followers, instead of Himself, when they wished to express disapproval, how even His companions were often afraid to be frank with Him, and how,

with a word, He could turn back the crowd that surged towards the house of Jairus, or dismiss the multitudes who had banqueted near the lake. But for Christ's own brief utterance, we might scarcely have ventured to call Him the servant.

Of Christ's lowly service we have learned especially from Paul. What a light is shed upon the earthly ministry by the words which, through the Book of Acts, are reported by him, "It is more blessed to give than to receive!" When we open the Gospels we look through Paul's eyes: for on every page he has stamped "the meekness and gentleness of Christ" (2 Cor. x. 1). And, as we read, we are haunted by the Apostle's exquisite picture of the Highest who humbled Himself and became obedient up to death. In recent years Jews and others have inferred from the Gospels that Jesus did not love the Pharisees. But what a sight of His lowly love we share with Paul, when he, a Pharisee, all stained with the blood of the Lord's brethren, says to Peter, without wincing, "The Son of God loved me, and gave Himself up for me"! (Gal. ii. 20).

Is it not probable that Paul's knowledge of the earthly life of Jesus was more extensive than ours? Is it not almost certain that, whether more extensive or not, it was more complete and many sided? It may be true that he sometimes refrained from quoting the utterances of Jesus when we might have expected him to do so. For references to deeds it

would, of course, be vain to look in letters, since these, doubtless, had been told and retold to the converts. However this may be, Paul appears to have so assimilated what he knew, and to have been so taught by "the Spirit of the Lord", that he could scarcely open his mouth, or take pen in hand, without expressing the mind of Jesus.

Christ as the supreme authority in religion is an ambiguous phrase. Even as regards the actual teaching of our Lord, we have no warrant for taking the Gospels as the sole authority. Paul's conception of Christ and His work may, for all that we know, have been based on historical grounds not fully disclosed to ourselves. We must admit the same possibility in connection with John's writings and Peter's. Quite apart from this, however, the life of the modern Christian cannot fail to be stunted if he neglects or disparages the Apostolic gifts of the Spirit, and still more, if He reduces Christ's own teaching until it becomes little more than reformed Judaism. To this it may be objected that we also have received the Spirit, and that new revelations in our time are not to be banned as a sheer impossibility, as if God no longer spoke to men. Is it not in virtue of newer light that we are able to discover flaws in Apostolic arguments, and that we are compelled to recognize imperfection even in the writings of Paul, Peter, and John? Why should any one draw a hard and fast line between such writings and those of holy men in later generations?

The answer is that no one can avoid drawing this line. As a matter of fact, there is a great gulf between the writings just named and the best of the early Christian literature, not excepting the Letters of Ignatius. He would be a bold man who would maintain that the voluminous authors of the first three centuries added anything fresh to the New Testament. They immensely diminished the light that they received. And when, in later ages, a breath of the Spirit came upon the Church, this usually meant a new study of the Epistles and a fresh insight. So it was with Augustine; so it was at the Reformation; so it has been in the great movements of subsequent times, when the dead Church has been quickened.

Shall we say that the great leaders have made a *simple return* to the Epistles? To take a more popular and tangible example, shall we assert that John Bunyan, in his *Pilgrim's Progress*, merely reproduced the New Testament teaching? When the terse and compressed instruction of the New Testament is so sifted, expounded and expanded, so diluted and illustrated, that it becomes what has often been called "the simple Gospel", and he who runs may read, is there not something new here? There is. History does not repeat itself. The novel rediscovery of Revelation is not a mere reissue. It may even be said that when the modern reader scans, in tract or treatise, this novel reproduction, and, illumined by the Spirit, sees common words printed in letters

of fire, here again there is something new. Certain it is that great leaders such as Augustine have uttered truths which were never so spoken in former times, not even by Apostles. Yet of a new Revelation we cannot speak.

May we venture to boast of new revelation in our own time? Does not every one feel that religion has been impoverished? Does not every one feel that if we have gained something, we have lost far more? We have at last learned to read the Gospels in their own light; and all sorts of men, religious and irreligious, have given their minds to this study. The issues are conflicting; and the spiritual fruit is of poorer quality than might have been expected. The Jesus of History has become better known, but not more ardently loved. Not seldom He is made to appear so little that we are at a loss to understand how He has achieved results so great. Sometimes the paradoxical effect of the study is that He almost disappears from view. For when His life is taken exclusively as an illustration of God's character, worship tends to become little more than a recognition of the Divine Father, the Christ-like God, who sorrows for the sins of mankind, and bears in His heart an eternal cross. Thus, in some modern preaching, Christ and the Spirit are scarcely mentioned; and the ever-recurring theme is the love of the Heavenly Father. Yet who can doubt that in our modern comprehension of the Gospels there is the possibility of a great religious advance? Who but

must hope and pray that the Person of Jesus may soon begin to exert upon His Church such an influence as it once exerted on Francis of Assisi and his followers, or such an influence, perhaps, as no preceding generation has ever known?

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